

**THE PENETRATION OF CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN
TEACHINGS ON THE CANONICAL FORM OF
MARRIAGE INTO TRADITIONAL YORUBA CULTURE:
INCULTURATION AS THE WAY FORWARD.**

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Dedication

To all Nigerian Families who long to work and live God's Kingdom on earth in their own language and culture.

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Abstract

For many decades, Western Scholars have defined and described the African traditional beliefs, institutions and practices in terms contrary to their own faiths and experiences. Early missionaries, explorers, and other foreign investigators branded the religious practices and the traditional institutions of the African peoples in such unacceptable and derogatory terms as animism, paganism, heathenism and fetishism. Anything that did not come from the “civilised” world was labelled “primitive”. Some extremists have even gone so far as to assume that God is a philosophical concept beyond the understanding of the savages.

Modern researches based on more thorough sociological, anthropological, linguistic, and theological verifications have demonstrated the inadequacies of the former theories. It is therefore not the purpose of the present study to appraise and signify the weakness of African traditional institutions and practices, but rather to provide the evangelical Christian community with a workable tool for inculturation.

Through this study, the researcher has demonstrated that the traditional Yoruba institutions and practices like marriage and family life, can and should serve as a point of contact for a kerygmatic proclamation. We must continue to explore ways to put such cultural information at the disposal of the reflecting minister and faith community, both critically and practically. From this study, we have thus discovered that the pole of cultural information on marriage among the Yoruba thus represents not a realm of unredeemed nature, but a mixed environment, partly antithetical to and partly complementary to Christian life.

Thus, this study looks at the traditional Yoruba marriage culture as an institution that has come into contact with the Catholic Christian teachings. Chapter one presents the general introduction of the thesis. The general introduction explains the author’s involvement with a group of married Catholic Christians, and consequently, how this study evolved. Here, we present the research problems, we also list the aims and objectives of the research and the research methodologies employed to meet the objectives.

The second chapter presents the background history of the Yoruba people before and after their contact with other cultures, namely, Colonialism and Christian enterprise of the Western nations. Here, some structural organization of the Yoruba people like the kingship and the extended family were thoroughly X-rayed as a way forward towards inculturation.

In the third chapter, the thesis examines the notion of marriage practices among the Yoruba and the importance the Yoruba attached to preparation in their traditional setting. It thus takes a critical look at Yoruba marriage traditions, the age-long practices and the changes brought about as the result of their contact with other cultures.

The fourth chapter treats the understanding and the development of the Catholic Christian marriage with its theology and teachings on marriage with particular respect to the canonical form.

In chapter five, the points of conflict between the traditional Yoruba held tenets on marriage treated in chapter three and the Christian/Western marriage practices treated in chapter four are examined as well as the similarities between the two cultures.

Chapter six draws together all the concepts and conclusions that were highlighted in the previous chapters. This helps to chart a path to a distinct proposal and recommendation for the pastoral care of Yoruba Christian families at all levels. Thus, a reflective inculturated Yoruba marriage rite based on a “tripartite coagulation theory” of partnership between the individual, the family (culture) and the Church (Christian tradition) is recommended as the way forward in integrating both cultures. Our recommendation thus suggested at least three postures from which the conversation between the religious tradition and cultural information might begin: (i) the religious tradition challenges the culture; (ii) the religious tradition is challenged by the culture; (iii) the religious tradition uses the resources of the culture in pursuit of its own religious mission.

Finally, from the summation of the research stated above, the seventh chapter summarises the entire thesis and proposes specific areas for further research.

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1. CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

Africa has been the subject of huge changes in the course of the last few decades. A spirit of nationalism has been awakened. It has been the impelling force in efforts to relieve colonization. With the end of the Second World War, there has been a big transition period in the course of which many African states have become independent. With the dismantling of Apartheid by President De Klerk of South Africa in 1994, the total political independence of the whole of Africa has become a reality. This breach has introduced another process of events: the necessity for spiritual independence. The Synod of African Catholic Bishops acknowledged this fact when they opined: "Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The reality of sin in its individual and social forms is very much present in the consciousness of these peoples, as is also the need for rites of purification and expiation"¹. The Synod Fathers further affirmed that "a serious concern for a true and balanced inculturation is necessary in order to avoid cultural confusion and alienation in our fast-evolving society"².

The Church in Africa in her Evangelizing Mission "Towards the Year 2000", in many ways can be said to have come at the fullness of time. A lot of remarks have been made about the successful impact of missionary enterprise in Africa as a result of the rapid growth in membership of the Christian Churches. Michael Fagun, in appraising the vibrant stride of Christianity in Black Africa opined: "When Europe seemed wearied of Christianity the spirit of Jesus seemed to have moved to Africa, Black Africa to be precise"³. The chaotic situation of the Church in Europe with the 'Enlightenment', the Industrial Revolution, Modernism and the two world wars, gave lease to missionaries to evangelize the newly opened Continent of Black Africa⁴. And the phenomenon of the growth of the 'Western Church' in Africa has led people like the late Bishop Fulton Sheen of America, the first electronic Catholic evangelist

¹ POST SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION: ECCLESIA IN AFRICA, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1995, p.44 (42).

² Ibid p.49.

³ Fagun, M.O., A Brief History of The Catholic Church, Nigeria: Ado-Ekiti, Hope Publishers, 1992, p.177.

⁴ Ibid.

and pamphleteer through the radio to state that "God has been operating with the white key, the time was at hand when he would operate with the black key"⁵, meaning that the Christian emphasis would shift from Europe to Africa". Along this same line, another Church historian, Stephen Neil, stated: "On the most sober estimate...by the end of the twentieth century, Africa South of Sahara will be in the main a Christian Continent"⁶.

A glance at the statistics compiled in 1982 by Barrett shows a steady growth of Christians (including Roman Catholics) especially between 1900 and 1970⁷. This steady growth in the statistic figures has equally been supported by Ikenga Metuh in his article "Incarnating Christianity in African World-Views". In the article, it was estimated that the Church in Africa was growing yearly with new members of 6,053,000 or about 16,000 new Christians daily. By 1984, of an African population of 515 million, 234 million or 45% were Christians. Islam is a close second with 41% or 211 million of the African population registering Moslem. African Traditional Religion seems the big loser, a distant third with only 63 million⁸. In 1986 Catholics numbered about 75 million or 13.11% of the entire population of Africa. Vocations to priestly and religious life are abundant. Over three-quarters of the 481 Catholic Bishops in Africa are Africans. The Church has doubled its population in Africa in the past ten years⁹. The 1995 survey by the Pastoral Institute of the Nigerian Catholic Bishops

⁵ This is quoted from Fagun, M.O., A Brief History of the Catholic Church, Op. cit. p.178.

⁶ Neill, S., A History of Christian Mission, America: Harvard University Press, 1965, p.165.

⁷ Barrett, D.B., (ed.), World Christian Encyclopedia, Nairobi, 1982, p.782.

⁸ Metuh, E.I. "African Traditional Religion and the Challenges of the Renaissance of African Culture" in Bulletin of African Religion and Culture, University of Jos, Jos Nigeria. 1987, Vol.1 No 1, pp.5-23.

⁹ Lineamenta for Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa., Vatican City, (1990) p.26.

Conference put the population of Nigerian Catholics as 12.5 million¹⁰ of which the area known as Yorubaland numbered 2.5 million¹¹.

The first major remark to note about this steady growth in African Christianity is the great contribution of the missionaries who introduced Christianity to the Black African Continent and kept the torch of the faith burning. Mojola Agbebi succinctly puts this when he opined: "Christianity was the best gift and the highest revelation to mankind; it was the elixir of life, the open sesame to all human happiness here on earth and in the world to come"¹². A major positive area is that with the coming of Christianity, God is projected in new dimension - made so much nearer than hitherto, given new significance to the high God of the African religions. Surely those who brought this divine gift to Africans, deserved the highest praise and the deepest gratitude, for Christianity was so priceless a gift that Africans must be ready to die for it. As Ayandele rightly put it:

"In the pre-colonial era when the missionary alone was the detector, revealer and spokesman for the interests of Africans, the practical achievements of Christianity, through the agency of missionaries, were patent for all to see. Through the exertions of his brethren in Europe, it was the missionary who freed the African from the physical bondage of the trans-Atlantic slave trade; who appealed to his home-country from Africa for the suppression of slave-catching, slave-selling and slave-holding; who through his school rescued the mind of the African from the trammels and shackles of superstition and ignorance; who made the African literate and consequently a beneficiary of knowledge of human achievements in other parts of the world; who, again through the school, made it possible for the gifted African to develop his talents and thereby reveal to the wider and sceptical-disposed world that he was biologically equal of the white man; who sought to improve the material well-being of the African and quite often identified and defended the interests of the African against the oppressive measures of the colonial ruler and the greediness and exploitation of the white trader"¹³.

¹⁰ Data Booklet for Catholic Church Directory, Ambassador Publications, Nigeria, 1995.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² African Church, Report of Proceedings of the African Church for Lagos and Yorubaland 1901-1908, Liverpool, 1910, p.85.

¹³ Ibid. p.8.

In spite of the evident success of missionary work in Africa seen in the teeming numbers of Africans who have embraced Christianity, the clear understanding of Christianity *per se* was muddled up with the human elements in institutionalised Christianity. Such human elements include the enormities being committed in Africa by white missionaries, merchants and secular agents all in the name of Christianity. Mojola Agbebi, in corroborating the distinction between Christianity *per se* and "European Christianity", opined:

"European Christianity is a dangerous thing. What do you think of a religion which holds a bottle of gin in one hand and a Common Prayerbook in the other? A religion which points with one hand to the skies, bidding you "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven", and while you are looking up, grasps all your worldly goods with the other hand, seizes your ancestral lands, labels your forests, and places your patrimony under inexplicable legislation? A religion which arrogates to itself censorial functions on sexual morality and yet promotes a dance, in which one man's wife dances in close contact, questionable proximity and improper attitude with another woman's husband. O! Christianity, what enormities are committed in thy name"¹⁴.

The Christian Church should be the *primus mobile* of the existence and development of Africans. But African missionaries today complain of lack of depth in the faith and commitment of their converts¹⁵. They say that the Christian faith of our people remain intractably shallow because the preaching and practice of the gospel has not appealed to their personality, to their authentic self, to their cultural heritage. Sometimes, the Church remains adamantly fixed in a number of secondary and changeable elements and thus drives the people underground. Often puritanical in our suppression of traditional practices "the repressive tendency of the mission has hindered the process of evangelization"¹⁶. The missionaries therefore lay the claim that many African Christians at critical moments in their lives have recourse to practices of the traditional religion or go to prayer houses/ healing homes,

¹⁴ African Church, Report of Proceedings of the African Church for Lagos and Yorubaland 1901-1908, Liverpool, 1910, p.91.

¹⁵ Arinze, Cardinal Francis, The Church and Nigerian Culture, Lenten Pastoral, Onitsha, Nigeria: Tabansi Press, 1973, p.18.

¹⁶ Cf. Malinowski, B., The Dynamics of Culture Change, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1976, p.69.

witchcraft prophets or fortune tellers. Some tend to join sects or so called "Independent Churches" where they feel that certain elements of their culture are taken into greater consideration than in the Church and that these Churches provide a satisfactory answer to their many problems¹⁷.

All these trends are challenges to Orthodox Churches. Chupungco remarks aptly here: "When the signs of the times indicate that a country wishes to preserve its family and national traditions or to return to them, the Church will do well to follow in the same train or else face the embarrassment of an overstaying alien". In matters which are not essential to the gospel the Church can learn from the wisdom of a Chinese proverb: "the stiffest tree is readiest for the axe; the strong and mighty topple from their place; the soft and yielding rise above them all"¹⁸.

Of course, there have been many enlightened elements of Africa in the past and at the present time who have questioned the meaning and relevance of Christianity among us. Nay, some are even doubting the relevance of Christ himself to our African life. As far back as the beginning of this century, Mojola Agbebi of Nigeria, Edward Wilmot Blyden of Liberia, "Holy" Johnson of Nigeria and Orishatukeh Faduma of Sierra Leone had advocated a Christianity that must be incarnated within the African milieu; that the Church was not to be absorbed into this milieu. In this respect they stressed and preached incessantly that those parts of African cultural heritage that were not incompatible with the essentials of Christianity should be preserved. Among the parts of the African heritage that they wished to see preserved, were names, the vernacular, clothing and marriage ceremonies (not polygamy)¹⁹. By and large, in their exposition of views like these, they stand out as being among the very few educated African elites of their time who saw that there was no necessary logical connection between Christianity and European culture. The universal belief of their time that still exists in the minds of thousands, if not millions, of Christians in various parts of Africa today, was that to be a Christian one must throw away their African names for a European or Hebrew one, boycott African dress in favour of European dress and abandon African methods

¹⁷ Cf. Hastings, A., Church and Mission in Modern Africa; London: Burns and Oates, 1967, p.59-60.; Independent Newspaper, Ibadan (Nigeria). April 22nd, 1990 p.1.

¹⁸ Chupungco, A.J., O.S.B., "*Peregrinatio Liturgica*", in Shalom, Vol.V, No.1., Enugu, Nigeria: CECTA Press, 1987.

¹⁹ Cf. Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, London, 1938; Mbonu, Ojike, My Africa, New York, 1946.

and style of courtship and marriage for the European (not necessarily Christian) methods and style²⁰.

Among the contemporary African thinkers and writers, there has been a follow-up of questions in this realm. For Jean-Marc Ela, "if Christianity does not want to be perceived as an apparatus or an ideological "phase" of colonialism, it must inculturate itself"²¹. On the same footing, Geffre, succinctly noted that "If the Churches are to rediscover the true originality of Christian universalism, they must take on the historical particularity of each people"²². Boulaga, in his proposal questions the rationale of the transplanted Western Christianity: "Can the status and functioning of dogmas acculturated in Western Christianity and civilization still be the same when Christianity is transplanted elsewhere, to another universe? Have the "truths to be believed" the same unambiguous weight of credibility everywhere?"²³ Christianness lies primarily in the "supra-cultural" functions and meanings expressed in culture rather than in the mere forms of any given culture²⁴. What God desires is not a single form of Church government "absolutely right, valid for every society and during every epoch, but the employment of the large number of diverse cultural forms of government with a single function - to glorify God by facilitating the smooth, well-ordered and in-culturally intelligible operation of the organizations that bear his name".

In his "*Un Visage Africain du Christianisme*", he modifies Temples' concept of 'vital force' with 'vital union' or 'vital participation'²⁵. Tshishiku Tshibangu brings a sociological

²⁰ Cf. Ayandele, E.A., A Visionary of the African Church, Nairobi: East African Pub. Ltd., 1971, pp.11-16.

²¹ Ela, J.M., My Faith as an African, London: Geoffrey Chapman, (trans. ed.) 1988, p.xiii.

²² Cf. Geffre, C., Theologte et choc des cultures, Colloque de l'Institut Catholique de Paris, Paris: Cerf, 1984.

²³ Boulaga, F.E., Christianity Without Fetishes: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity, New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, (trans. ed.) 1984, p.2.

²⁴ Cf. Kraft, C.H., Christianity in Culture, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1980, p.118.

²⁵ Mulago, V., Un Visage Africain du Christianisme, Paris, 1965.

perspective to African theology. In his "*Theologie Positive et Theologie Speculative Position Traditionnelle et Nouvelle Problematique*", he studies the history of theological methodology pointing out new insights for African theology²⁶. In another of his books, "*La Theologie Comme Science au xxeme Siecle*," he shows how theology should be related to the people and their society²⁷.

Ngindu Mushete advocates an approach in African Theology that involves the exposure of the totality of African life and thought to the Christian message²⁸. Charles Nyamiti advocates the use of African conceptual categories to explain Christian doctrine²⁹. Barthelemy Adoukonou, an anthropologist and theologian applies the structuralism of Levi-Straus and the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur in his theological approach. He seeks, through this method, to bring about a creative encounter between African values and the Christian faith³⁰. For Patrick Kalilombe, African theology must be a grass-roots theology which means not theologising about or for people, but theologising with the people³¹. John S. Pobee's writings cover both inculturation and liberation issues. He insists on the recognition of certain

²⁶ Tshibangu, T., *Theologie Positive et Theologie Speculative Position Traditionnelle et Nouvelle Problematique*, Paris, 1965.

²⁷ Tshibangu, T., *La Theologie Comme Science au xxeme Siecle*, Zaire, 1980.

²⁸ Mushete, N., *La Probleme de la Connaissance Religieuse d'apres L. Laberthonniere*, Kinshasa, 1977.

²⁹ Nyamiti, C., *The Way to Christian Theology for Africa*, Kenya: Eldoret, 1978; *African Tradition and the Christian God*, Kenya: Eldoret, 1977; *Christ the Ancestor*, Harare, 1984.

³⁰ Adoukonou, B., *Jalons pour une Theologie Africaine*, Vols. 1 & 2, Paris, 1979.

³¹ Kalilombe, P., *From Out-Station to Small Christian Community*, Kenya: Eldoret, 1984; "Doing Theology at the Grassroots: A Challenge for Professional Theologians" in *AFER* 27, 1985, pp.148-161 & pp.225-237.

non-negotiable elements in Christianity in the process of inculturation and advocates a re-reading of the bible from the African perspective³².

What is happening on the African Continent must therefore alarm any Christian leader. This made Sarpong, (a Catholic bishop) question the impact of Christianity on the lives of Africans in his article: "Inculturation and the African Church"³³. He asked rhetorically: "why is it that Christianity has not got the same impact on our lives as the traditional religion did in the past?" In a self-response, he adduced the fault to the fact that Christianity has not been part and parcel of the African lives. According to him, "In the past religion was inseparable from any aspect of my people's life. There was no distinction between politics and religion, farming and religion. Whatever a person was doing he or she was deeply involved in a religious experience. Religion was relevant to life. This is how it should be. Religion should not be divorced from people's needs and actual life. We need inculturation to make Christianity relevant and effective"³⁴.

1.2 The Problem

As already stated above, the Christianity preached to the Africans created its own problems, namely in the understanding of the socio-religious institutions in Africa and their relevance to the daily life of the people.

For an African, religion and daily life are one and the same reality. The marketplace can be a place of worship. Bearing one another's burdens and enjoying life together, both are expressions of faith. Working together, sharing, dancing together - everything is meant to transform this earth into a place where God is present among his people. In the West, religion is compartmentalized making it into a series of activities - saying prayers, attending the eucharist on Sunday, reading a spiritual book. Thus, the Western Logic according to Joseph Healey "has divided faith into series of distinctions and categories"³⁵.

³² Pobee, J.S., Towards an African Theology, Nashville, 1979.

³³ Sarpong, P.K., (Bishop), "Inculturation and the African Church" in Shalom, Vol.6, No.2, Enugu, Nigeria: CECTA Press, 1988, p.77.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Healey, J.G., A Fifth Gospel: In Search of Black Christian Values, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1981, p.141.

In order to unveil this problem further, I would like to use here an illustrated pastoral problem on the field as a preamble to the start of the research question. It is a true story of a Catholic family - **Lawrence and Agnes**. They were married in an urban Catholic Church fifteen years ago. Both of them are from the same village and ethnic group - Yoruba. Prior to their wedding in the Church, they went through part of the traditionally accepted steps towards marriage in Yoruba society³⁶ but never completed the last major step which is the marriage or the handing over of the wife to the family of the bridegroom. They both live in an urban city centre of Lagos which is about two hundred miles away from their home village. But each time they both travelled back to the village, the wife was not allowed by tradition to put up with the husband in the family's compound. She stayed in her family's compound home. The reason for this is that since the man has not gone through the formal final stages of the traditional marriage and its rituals, it is the belief of the community that they were not married. Rather, they were seen as boy- and girl-friend. Worse still, children born without performing this full traditional rites are not recognised or accepted legitimate children by the customs. On the other hand, because the wedding took place in the Church and in the presence of the priest or pastor in-charge, the marriage is recognised by the Christian community as valid and consummated³⁷. Because of this cultural embarrassment, the couple performed this final stage and the rites attached to it about three years ago.

This mish-mash conflict between the demands of 'Christian morality' and those of 'customary or traditional law' constitutes a daily problem for a large number of baptized Africans³⁸.

³⁶ In a normal situation, there are three main processes to be followed before one can be regarded to be actually married in Yorubaland, viz. An Early Intimation, A Formal Betrothal and The Marriage. Lawrence and Agnes only went through the first two processes. These processes are taken up fully in the third chapter of this thesis.

³⁷ Tape-recorded interview with the couple concerned in Nov. 1994.

³⁸ Cf. Jacob M. Agossou has developed this intercultural encounter in reconciling African beliefs and ritual practices with the demands of some kind of modernization which have arisen with different cultural systems particularly of the West in his article "The Demands of the Gospel and African Anthropology" in Concilium: The Churches of Africa, U.S.A: Seabury Press, 1977.

What follows is an attempt to stimulate thought on two aspects of this problem. The first is the difference between the demands of the Gospel and a kind of Christian morality which is a system of 'sociological' rules derived from the history of Western behaviour. The second is the conflict between this morality and African ethics, itself based on the antithesis of life and death.

It is pertinent to state here that by cultural clash it is not meant that the principles of Christianity as a religion are opposed to the authentic and honest values of African culture. Cultural clash here must be understood as the conflict between the Western cultural vessel in which Christianity has been conveyed to Africa and the authentic values and honest institutions of the African culture.

So in African society today, these conflicts become more pronounced when people are faced with problems of marriage, economics, religious beliefs, political options, and so on. Topics for reflection and research, such as 'traditional African beliefs and Christian faith', 'traditional African economy and development', 'traditional African values and conversion', 'African socialism and Western socialism' etc., rouse much and even passionate interest everywhere. From the 'man in the street' of our African towns to those in the far off African villages, the question remains how to reconcile African beliefs and ritual practices with the demands of some kind of modernization which have arisen from the encounter with different cultural systems; particularly with the West and its value-systems, which arrived and installed itself by force, and which is still there in spite of political independence; and impose this on the gradual destruction of our best-tryed institutions like marriage and family life, political structures and so on. For the Africans, life-themes like family life and marriage were understood differently in terms of Christian values from some aspects of African culture. While on the other hand, the similarities which could have been turned into use as value in inculturation process, and consequently in the successful evolution of authentic liturgies, rites and theology were underestimated and discarded for Western values sold on the platters of civil law and education. In other words, the gap between theological reflection and grass-roots reality remains a big gulf for the theological solution proffered so far lacks practicability in the midst of a real-life conflict³⁹.

³⁹ Cf. Kalu, O.U., "The Dilemma of Grassroots Inculturation of the Gospel: A Case Study of a Modern Controversy in Igboland, 1983-1989" in Journal of Religion in Africa, Vol.XXV, (New York: E.J. Brill Leiden), Feb. 1995, p.49.

The situation becomes complex as more and more modern Africans find themselves between two worlds in today's rapid social change. Born of parents in an African culture, they may spend part of their lives in a village context, have a taste of their cultural heritage, then a new world begins to dawn on them as they go to school and climb the ladder of educational achievements with Western curricula. Soon they begin to question some of their indigenous traditional values and come into a conflict of loyalties between what they are exposed to and what they grew up with.

The conflict becomes more evident and even acute and complicated as the demands of life come along with studies, work and other life experiences. A few individuals may finish the first stages of formal education in a village, continue secondary school away from home, and go to the University in the city. Ahead of these individuals lie prospects of work, marriage, and "good" living. In the process of these changes and growth, there may be strong Western influence on the individual's reasoning and lifestyle, but the roots of the traditional African background are not and cannot be completely cut off. There is booming city life, but there are also the resources and demands of the traditional village life. How should the modern African respond to this pull, which is a reality on both sides of the life experience?. The conflicts may become so pronounced that the current generation does not necessarily look to African cultural traditions for answers to all its questions. The school system which is based on Western curriculum has alienated them from their roots as they can no longer draw on the knowledge transmitted by the great masters of oral tradition. As a result the meaning of traditional ceremonies and traditional education escapes them, and the use of oral style is barely discernible in their manner of speaking or living⁴⁰.

For those who live mainly in the villages with less exposure to Western and other external influences, things do not remain the same. No part of Africa is too isolated today to escape the wave of economic, social, and political changes which infiltrate every stratum of society directly or indirectly. In the villages, the majority of villagers desire to send their children to school, from which the latter emerge with conflicts between loyalty to the tradition and liberal minds with foreign ideas.

The Christian pastor in contemporary Africa finds himself or herself in that context and conflict, asking the question of how to minister in such situation. Nwabuisi's thesis suffices here to show that the African Clergy, or rather the Nigerian clergy, suffer religio-

⁴⁰ Ela, J.M., *Op. cit.* p.xv.

cultural nostalgia. They are in a system which has no regard for their roots. They belong to a religion imported just as their automobile, electronics or the whole of the country's technology has been imported. Like their brother and sister scientists, they feel inadequate, helpless and too discouraged to do anything about their total dependence on foreign-made goods⁴¹. Elobuiké presses further that the Nigerian clergy accuse the missionary of seeing evil in everything African, while they themselves see more evil there.

The hold of missionary preaching on the consciousness of the Nigerian clergy is such that despite the clergy's awareness of the positive worth of the African way of life, they appear unprepared and even refuse to re-examine this traditional African way of life with a view to drawing philosophical, theological or pastoral lessons. They prefer to solve their problems with solutions suitable for another country⁴². Elochukwu's synthesis of the African clergy's incapacitation may help here in dealing with reasons for their refusal to re-examine the traditional way of Africa. As he put it, "The successors whom the missionaries appointed continued their strategy and shepherded the flock. But being schooled in prudential compliance to authority and tradition, they lacked initiative"⁴³. He further explained that "in more recent years Africa has seemed to prefer a 'prudent' implementation guided by Rome to an active and creative reception. A major reason for this passive prudence is the "dependency syndrome"⁴⁴. Among the qualities required to function as a good priest or religious, obedience comes out on top, drawing attention to the issue of power within the Church. According to Elochukwu, in the Continent where 50% live in absolute poverty, and an estimated 400 million will be living in extreme poverty by 1995, candidates for priesthood and religious life are assured of food and other material necessities of life by foreign agencies and the local contribution of the laity⁴⁵. They are thus rendered incapable of appreciating in a practical way

⁴¹ Nwabuisi, E.M., "Socialization and The Nigerian Child: A Case Study of Ebe Child-Rearing" in Religion and African Culture, Spiritan Pub., 1988, p.10.

⁴² Ibid. p.10.

⁴³ Elochukwu, E.U., "The Birth and Development of a Local Church: Difficulties and Signs of Hope" in Concilium Towards the African Synod, London: SCM Press, 1992, p.17.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the lot of a majority of Africans; also the root cause of our poverty escapes them at a practical level. However, they are *dependent* because they *are fed*. But instead of abandoning the dependency syndrome by directing attention to the concern of Africa, they are diverted by the hand that feeds them to be preoccupied with the concerns of the Church of Rome - its laws, its rituals, its doctrines: these are imposed on a bemused mass of believers, whether they are tangentially related to contextual problems or not”⁴⁶.

Our problem now is that we do not even know the traditional life we long for. This then, is where we are in the Church in Africa: beautiful church buildings, huge numbers of adherents, the clergy and laity, all are standing at a cross-roads. One of the directions of this cross-roads is marked African traditional religion, another, Westernized Christianity, the third cosmetic Africanisation and the fourth, African inculturated Christianity. The African stands at this road junction and examines the options. On the first, he is to live his traditional faith as the basis for his existence, the symbol of meaningfulness. In the second, the African enters a Westernized Church, but resorts to the meaningfulness of traditional faith at key points in life.

The difference between the second and third option is that in the latter there is some semblance of that African Christianity advocated by Pope Paul VI⁴⁷. The fourth option is where the African lives an inculturated Christianity. Here he is every inch African and Christian. The Africanisation of Christianity increases the wealth of the meanings of the symbolism of Christ, while the Christification of his Africanity brings about a healthy transformation of the culture of the person bringing creation to perfection in Christ seeing that all was created in and for Christ⁴⁸.

An attempt to answer this question is our honest response to discovering the implications of the directives of “mutual enrichment” contained in the Second Vatican document concerning dialogue. Commenting on the official teaching of the Church concerning the need for such a dialogue, Aylward Shorter observes:

⁴⁶ Elochukwu, E., Ibid. p.19.

⁴⁷ Paul VI Pope "The African Church Today" in The Pope Speaks in Washington DC., 1969, 14 pp.214-220.

⁴⁸ Umoren, U.E, "Inculturation and the Future of the Church in Africa" in Evangelization in Africa in the Third Millennium: Challenges and Prospects (eds), Port-Harcourt Nigeria, CIWA Press, 1992, p.63.

"Non-Christian religions retain within them 'seeds of the Gospel', certain values and insights which anticipate explication in formal Christianity. According to this, non-Christian religion is a *praeparatio evangelii*, a preparation for the Gospel of Christ.. (But) it has to be made clear that the African traditional religion is not simply a preparation for Christianity as we know it now, but that it paves the way for Christianity of the future, even for the era of the whole Christ, when God shall be all in all. Hence the importance of maintaining a dialogue, rather than indulging in condemnation or in expression of superiority. There are also cases where African insights could awake themes which have lain dormant in Christianity for a long period, or even themes which are latent in Christianity or are awaiting development. Nevertheless, we must not be afraid of pointing out those elements in African Traditional Religion which appear to be directly opposed to Christian tradition"⁴⁹.

The word 'inculturation' is no longer a new concept as such in Africa. Shortly after the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI, in 1969, exhorted the bishops of Africa to evolve an African Christianity⁵⁰. In that speech, he was taking an unprecedented step in the history of inculturation. Earlier documents had, indeed, mentioned the need to keep intact the cultures of peoples being evangelized. In 1659, Propaganda Fide wrote to the Vicars Apostolic of Indo-China:

"Make no effort, advance no argument to induce these people to change their rites, customs and morals unless there is manifest opposition to religion and morality. What could be more absurd, in fact, than to transcribe France,

⁴⁹ Shorter, A., "African Traditional Religion and Moral Education" in *AFER* 14 (1972), pp.304ff. Shorter refers here to *Ad Gentes Divinitus* No.15. It is important to note that what he said here about the need for Christianity to enter into dialogue with African traditional religion is also applicable to the dialogue between Christian doctrines and practices on marriage and the Yoruba traditional marriage practices, because the latter forms a part of the African traditional customs and practices and, therefore, experiences the same basic problems in the face of Christianity.

⁵⁰ Cf. Paul VI, "Address at the closing of All African Bishop's Symposium", *AFER* 11 (1969) 402. To be successful, a "native" apostolate must needs to be carried out by the "native" Christ in the person of his "native" members.

Spain, Italy or any other European country among these Chinese. It is not that which must be imported but the faith”⁵¹.

However, in the directive, it is not stated clearly that the culture of the people being evangelized can be enriched by Christianity so that, in its turn, it may enrich Christianity. This is where Paul VI went a step further. In doing this, he was putting into explicit words what the Vatican Council had said. The Council had advised research into cultural matters in each socio-cultural region:

“The seed which is the word of God grows out of good soil watered by the divine dew, it absorbs moisture, transforms it, and makes it part of itself, so that eventually it bears much fruit. So too indeed, just as happened in the economy of the incarnation, the young Churches, which are rooted in Christ and built on the foundations of the apostles, take over all the riches of the nations which have been given to Christ as an inheritance (cf. Ps. 2:8). They borrow from the customs, traditions, wisdom, teaching, arts and sciences of their people everything which could be used to praise the glory of the Creator, manifest the grace of the saviour, or contribute to the right ordering of Christian life. To achieve this, it is necessary that in each of the great socio-cultural regions, as they are called, theological investigation should be encouraged and the facts and words revealed by God, contained in sacred Scripture, and explained by the Fathers and Magisterium of the Church, submitted to a new examination in the light of the tradition of the universal Church. In this way it will be more clearly understood by what means the faith can be explained in terms of the philosophy and wisdom of the people, and how their customs, concept of life and social structures can be reconciled with the standard proposed by divine revelation. Thus a way will be opened for a more profound adaptation in the whole sphere of Christian life. This manner of acting will avoid every appearance of syncretism and false exclusiveness; the Christian life will be adapted to the mentality and character of each culture, and local traditions together with the special qualities of each national family, illumined by the light of the Gospel, will be taken up into a Catholic unity. So new particular Churches, each with its own traditions, have their place in the community of the Church, the primacy of Peter which presides over this universal assembly of charity all the while remaining intact.

And so it is to be hoped, and indeed it would be a very good thing, that episcopal conferences should come together within the boundaries of each great socio-cultural region and by a united and co-ordinated effort pursue this proposal of adaptation”⁵².

⁵¹ "Instructio Vicariorum Apostolicorum ad Regna Synarum Tonchini et Cocinnae Proftciscentium" in Collectanea Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, Vol.1 (Rome, 1907), p.42.

⁵² *Ad Gentes* No.22.

Unfortunately for the Nigerian Church, this official statement which clearly underscored the Church's policy with regard to indigenous cultures has yet to be taken up fully. According to one of the informants:

"all along no serious attempt has been made in genuine incarnation or adaptation in liturgy in this country"⁵³.

Basil Nwazojie's phraseology that "Nigeria is a "borrowist" nation with a "copyist" mentality"⁵⁴ also tells much about the situation of the Nigerian Church. According to him, "Imitation is the law and practice of the majority of its citizenry, ecclesiastical and civilian"⁵⁵. Originality is a far distant cry whose creation defies the "rush-rush" habit of Nigerian life. Hence, to explore the road to, and progress of, inculturation in the liturgy of the Catholic Church in Nigeria is to trace a history of imitations and copyphilia through the years. It is natural to expect that where authenticity and originality are lacking mediocrity rules the day. There is no appeal to real life but only to its shadows.

This point is partly illustrated in a saying attributed to Pope John Paul II when he visited Nigeria in 1982. After the Eucharistic celebration at one of the national centres where people had gathered to welcome him, he is quoted as having said: "Here I have found a liturgy which is celebrated in a manner more Roman than what obtains in Rome itself", or in other words, the Nigerian Church has become a replica of Rome or Rome transplanted into Nigeria!⁵⁶.

⁵³ Gbuji, A.O., Catholic Bishop of Issele-Uku Diocese and Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria representative on Liturgy. In his house Issele-Uku, Delta State, September 1994.

⁵⁴ Nwazojie, B.K., "The Nigerian Hierarchy and Liturgical Inculturation in the Nigerian Church" Inculturation in Nigeria, Lagos, Nigeria: Catholic Secretariat Press, 1988, p.67.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Nwazojie, B.K., Op cit. p.67.

The Nigerian society has become voluptuously materialistic and the Nigerian Church has followed suit⁵⁷. The society is too eclectic. It is in this picture that what might be called the steps of the Nigerian Church towards inculturation takes its colour. A highly placed Nigerian ecclesiastic and an informant said of the situation in 1975:

“Our Christians of today have a double personality. The speed with which many Christians relapse into superstitious practices at times of stress should worry us all. Such are times of sickness, examinations, football matches, birth and marriage ceremonies, title-taking and especially funeral ceremonies”⁵⁸.

According to him:

“in 1975, he advocated bringing to the Church’s liturgy a local traditional form of wedding of the Yorubas. So he presented a brief memo to the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, but unfortunately the memo was glossed over and nothing came of it. When he represented his conviction on this matter again in 1979 to the same group, it was briefly discussed and dropped because the “Western form of marriage has come to stay, some claimed, at least in some areas of the country where Church form is popular in principle”⁵⁹.

Missionary method may be blamed for some of the ills of lopsided Christianity in the Nigerian Church just as in other African Churches. But to a greater measure, the weight of self-questioning and heart-beating lies with the Church leadership which has swallowed without questioning every movement and action of missionary preaching of the past one hundred years⁶⁰. “We are living and operating”, said Uzukwu, “within the framework of a

⁵⁷ This is one of the influences of Westernization or modernization through the contact with capitalist Western nations.

⁵⁸ Interview with Bishop Michael Fagun, (aged 61yrs), Catholic Bishop of Ekiti Diocese, Nigeria at his residence in October 1994.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ A lot of Catholic Churches and other Christian Churches have celebrated the centenary of Christian implantation or evangelization in Nigeria.

gospel handed down to us by missionaries and are maintained without question by our Church and its leadership”⁶¹.

We should not lament the missionary effort in spreading the gospel to our lands. Perhaps what we should lament is the false understanding of what missionary work consists of. To most missionaries, it was concerned principally and perhaps entirely “with conversion work, with preaching and baptizing rather than with the establishment of a self-supporting, self-ministering, self-propagating unit of the Catholica, an active eucharistic community or group of communities”⁶². What resulted from the mistake was the establishment of a dormant, and disturbingly-evasive Church. If we should listen to what the hierarchy of Nigeria has achieved in the field of inculturation in the liturgy for example, it may be best to listen to the bishops themselves. A glance at inculturation in the Nigerian Church with respect to liturgy reveals nothing to be proud of:

“The liturgy has been beautifully clothed in Nigerian language and music. But this has been largely skin-deep. I am not sure we have even started to go to the heart and soul of the matter in the use of the religious vehicles of expression in which our traditional cultures are so rich”⁶³.

This statement seems to be a repetition of the same picture as it existed in 1979 and in 1982⁶⁴. I shall briefly mention the parts of the liturgy in order to see what steps have been covered. If we look closely at the parts of the liturgy we may be able to find some traces of movement towards the “transplantation” of the liturgy into the Nigerian environment.

With respect to the Mass, the vernacular has been introduced throughout the nation. That does not, however, cancel the questionable practice in many Churches, where the

⁶¹ Uzukwu, E., C.S.Sp. The Church and Inculturation, Obosi, Nigeria: Pacific College Press, Ltd., 1985, p.3.

⁶² Cf. Hastings, A., Church and Mission in Modern Africa, London: Burns and Oates, 1967, pp.16-17.

⁶³ Archbishop John Onaiyekan, an informant, interviewed in his residence in Abuja, May 1995. He is the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja Diocese and the vice-president of the Synod of African Catholic Bishops - Rome 1995.

⁶⁴ The statement made by both Bishop Fagun in 1979 and Pope John Paul II in 1982. Op. cit.

presence of one or two foreigners in the assembly immediately dictates the language of the Mass to be English, or “half-English” and “half-vernacular” or translations of the same rendered subsequently one after the other in the same celebration. The readings especially are done in as many languages as there are tongues in the assembly. Vernacular singing has become a common practice in our Churches. But the Liturgical Music Commission has yet a great task to fashion out of many, what is truly liturgical music⁶⁵.

Translations and publications of Mass texts (the sacramentary), with strict fidelity to the Roman Missal, have been effected in some major Nigerian languages, notably Yoruba and Hausa and a few of the other minor languages. There exists a translation of the Order of the Mass in the Igbo and Yoruba languages. But what these translations have lamentably omitted is the mode of expression of the people. The terse, aristocratic language of the Roman court has been faithfully followed in rendering those translations with the result that they give no appeal to, nor make sense to the worshipping African or Nigerian community.

It is apposite to say that no sane person runs away from the good unless the good is presented in a way that repugnates. The truth of the Christian religion or revealed truth is unmistakably the loftiest thing that can be given to humanity: “the truth will make you free”⁶⁶.

It should provoke very serious questioning if after it is well-presented in people’s cultural milieu that the person should abandon that truth to seek refuge and freedom elsewhere. But where the presentation is alien to adherers, then they may fail to grasp the message and then look for alternatives that suit their motive.

On the other sacraments, apart from the publication of the “National Directory for the Baptism of Infants and the Christian Initiation of Adults” by the Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Nigeria and the mandatory legislation in 1980 of introducing the catechumenate for the initiation of adults and school children, there has not been a great contribution forthcoming⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ I attended a meeting of the National Liturgical Commission formed by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria during my first few weeks of field work in Nigeria (Oct.1994). Only half of the members attended and the work-shop was based on merely translating the existing liturgical texts in English.

⁶⁶ Jn. 8:32.

⁶⁷ In Regina Mundi Parish Community, Mushin, Lagos, where I stayed for the period of my field-work, I observed that rote-learning is still the preferred method in the

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In a few places, some minor experiments are being made with the rite of Infant baptism but they have not been serious enough to attract much comment⁶⁸.

On the sacred art and furnishings, liturgical vestments are being sown in the country according to Western form. A few thrusts of initiative have been made but they remain very insignificant. McHenry noted in this regard: "traditional dress is *de-rigueur* in these parts of West Africa - certain forms of African traditional dress could be very suitable as liturgical vestments"⁶⁹. But from evidence on the field, these remain proposals. From the interview conducted among a spectrum of clergy in Yorubaland, the clergy are still searching for a distinctive dress in tune with culture and their calling.

In the area of the arts, Church architecture and symbolic expression have hardly taken the cultural background seriously. Church designs and paintings are still conceived and executed in West European grand-style. No cathedral is beautiful and admirable unless copied from Europe or America and often done by the hands of foreign architectural partners!

Another area of attention was the lay ministries. In some parts of the country it was experimented to introduce lay deacons into the Church. The experiment seems to have gradually faded away since very many of the dioceses do not favour the idea. No serious thinking has been given to finding lay assistants for the ministry of baptism, the eucharist, marriage, sacrament of the sick, etc. It will not be out of place to say therefore from this evidence that what has been done so far is like a drop of water falling into the ocean.

The problems attendant on real purpose-built and effective inculturation are many, but it has been made multiple by the characteristic of the Nigerian leadership and its followership. "Worship has by nature a missionary function"⁷⁰ and should be ordered to that end. The planning of worship has, therefore, to be divested of that old stamp of passive Christianity and

teaching of the catechism. Although the catechumens were divided into age-groups, the method used has not changed from the old missionary methods of memorizing the catechetical basis of their faith.

⁶⁸ In the Regina Mundi Parish, parents are to attend a pre-baptism meeting with the priest before they have their children baptized.

⁶⁹ McHenry, F., O.S.B., Op. cit.

⁷⁰ Hahn, F., The Worship of the Early Church, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, p.105.

the elements of a status and rank-seeking Church, with *status quo* in Nigeria, which Uzukwu characteristically captioned a "hierarchology"⁷¹.

Such a *status quo* is the result of a false ecclesiology of the post-reformation era which has been supplanted by Vatican II. Today in Nigeria, after a century of the Christian experience, one could hardly speak without shame of Nigeria still remaining on the platform of primary evangelization.

Hahn insists, in the sphere of meaningful inculturation, that there should be an openness to change. "All legalism" he said, "is contrary to the nature of worship performed by the community assembled in the name of Jesus. It must be kept free of rigid institutional order"⁷².

Too often the attempts of researchers or experimentalists to forge a new liturgical custom consonant with apparent genuine cultural aspirations tend to have looked more intensely at the law rather than at the person. The good of the individual before the Creator has often been kept to the background while the voice and brakes of authority have been put in the forefront.

In the case of Nigeria, it is to be said here that volumes of well-researched material written by hundreds of Nigerians (clergy especially, and the laity alike) abound in Europe, the Americas and in Nigeria⁷³. Most of these have done justice to most Nigerian local customs and traditions. But, they have remained unpublished in a majority of cases, and where published, have ended up on dusty bookshelves and in baskets⁷⁴. There is no one to take

⁷¹ Uzukwu, E., Church and Inculturation, Op. cit. p.16-17.

⁷² Hahn, F., Op. cit. p.107.

⁷³ A tertiary Catholic Institute of West Africa has been opened by all anglo-phone countries in Port-Harcourt, Nigeria, for the purpose of researching into areas of African inculturation. But so far, the purpose has not been achieved as the institute is an affiliate of the Pontifical college in Rome. It means that all published researched materials need a *nihil obsta* of the Church of Rome. So only favourable and acceptable material to the so-called universal Church is given an accent.

⁷⁴ This fact is confirmed by an informant who is a highly-placed professor in the Catholic Institute of West Africa during an interview with him.

action. The hierarchy is overworked; the priests are faced with administering the sacraments, attending to the sick, "hearing" confessions, and all those other routine businesses about which every pastor is accustomed.

Lack of time on the part of those who should care constitutes another obstacle to inculturation. The Catholic Church is status-oriented. The Church is best known as the Rev. Father's Church. The blessing of a home, baptism of an infant or adult, marriage ceremonies, burial of a Christian, performed by a bishop has greater merit and is more precipitously sought after than those carried out by a parish priest or pastor or his assistant: or failing which, any other priest including a teaching priest may be considered. With such encumbrances and petty attachments to crowd admiration, the clergy, and particularly the bishop, has no time.

The points raised above lead to a false conception of the function of power in the Nigerian Church. There is no gainsaying that power corrupts and corrupts absolutely, whether it be military, civilian or spiritual power. Power is power, no matter who bears it. Delegation of functions has remained an offensive nomenclature in the vocabulary of the hierarchy. It has been very difficult in this regard for the Nigerian Church hierarchy to learn to accept in practice to demythologize authority and to sacramentalise humanity⁷⁵ to serve and not to rule.

This fact of a hold to authority is borne out in a number of qualified intellectuals in every diocese of Nigerian Church who are made non-functional in their various field of expertise by their various hierarchy. For example, in nearly all the forty Catholic dioceses in Nigeria, we have very many doctors in the fields of Philosophy, Theology, History, Pastoral, Liturgy, Spirituality, Scripture, Psychology, Canon Law, etc. The question remains "to what use have they been put since they assumed ministry in the parish or in the schools"? Who has been given a function and accorded full responsibility, the encouragement and liberty to exercise his/her initiative, judgement and sense of mission to bring the task to an end? Power is given for service and not for domination; the symbol of that power, the "crozier" or the staff is given to gather the flock and not to knock or scatter them.

According to Basil Nwazojie⁷⁶ the root source of humanity's cultural activity is the reason and freedom which when denied or impeded in the legitimate expression of those

⁷⁵ Cf. Nwazojie, B.K., "Indigenization of the Liturgy in Igbo Traditional Marriage Customs", unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Rome, 1976, pp.114-119 on the notion and import of sacramentality.

⁷⁶ Op. cit.

inherent attributes or gifts, tends to behave abnormally. Where mutual suspicion exists, there is no confidence. Between the hierarchy and the generality of the clergy, that situation seems to be the order of the day.⁷⁷

For Christianity to be rooted in African soil, we must first learn to see Christ as an African - through the eyes and aspirations of the African⁷⁸. Kraft has expressed this same idea when he talked of God above culture but working through culture⁷⁹. The model of Christ in culture assumes that, though God exists totally outside of culture, God chooses the cultural milieu in which humans are immersed as the arena of his interaction with people. Thus, when he speaks, whether directly or indirectly, to Adam or Abraham or Moses or the disciples or us he does so by employing human, not divine, language. And this language participates fully in human culture with its strengths and weaknesses, its heights and depths, its glories and sinfulness, its facilitating of communication and limiting of it. He uses human language with all its fitness, its relativity, and its assured misperception of infinity⁸⁰.

The primary task of this exercise is education. People are first to be trained by what they hear and what they see. The good news must really be good news by evangelizing, impregnating, regenerating the very core of culture, and gently penetrating the very heart of the earth. This can only be done through the Church's dialogue with Nigerian culture, particularly the Yoruba culture.

With particular reference to the Church's dialogue with the Yorubas, we affirm that such a dialogue is very necessary in order to discover the similarities and the dissimilarities between the two forms of practices within the two groups.

A major way forward to the dialogue, is by researching into our traditional way of life and building our theology, liturgy, catechetics and morality around it. Inculturation has to address itself to the expressions of "doctrine and liturgy and personal devotions, to Church organization, art and music"⁸¹. Whether in the manner of presenting doctrine (the traditional methods of education are an invaluable subject for study here) or in the actual practice of

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Cf. Ela, J.M., My Faith as an African, Op. cit.

⁷⁹ Kraft, C.H., Op. cit. p.113.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.114.

⁸¹ Cf. Hastings, A., Op. cit. p.16.

spiritual exercises and devotions (this we shall see later when we examine the organized cultic life of the family nucleus), Church organization in Yorubaland and indeed in Nigeria today is a very distant dream from the known traditional system of community organization and leadership⁸².

But first of all, we shall define and clarify our terms “**tradition**” and “**values**” and what we mean by the terms in this context. A definition of the terms, **value** and of **tradition** that interpret directly and legitimately what we mean by them in the context of this thesis is absolutely necessary to our work.

By the term **value** in this study, our first task is to show things in facts and figures, just as they are already valued and established by a known and living society. We shall also look into the basis and the sources of their validity and their finality.

James Whitehead *et al.*, have defined a tradition, religious or cultural, as an amalgam of “critically remembered and interpreted experiences”⁸³. In other words, certain experiences - of discovery, failure, survival, celebration - deeply impress a people; as these experiences are recalled, further celebrated, and interpreted, they begin to form a tradition, a way of self-understanding⁸⁴.

In studying the people in their system of thought and in their philosophical, religious, economic, ideological, and political activities, we shall be at the same time studying the society globally to know how much it has put such-and-such accent on such-and-such a thing. We shall equally know what are the determinants of those accents, their contents, forms and variations, how these determinants play the role of constituents of the dominant ideology of a society including its normative structures, its laws, logic, justifications or its religion, its constraints and its manner of coercion. It is all these that we shall call the Yoruba traditional values, within the context of this thesis.

In brief, our task does not lend itself to the study of **value** as a mere notion or concept but in as much as it plays the role of the social norm expressing the ambition of a society.

⁸² Cf. Harris, M., Culture, Man and Nature, New York: Columbia University Press, 1971, pp.377-8.

⁸³ Whitehead, J.D., & Whitehead, E.A., Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry, London: Harper & Row Pub., 1980, p.56.

⁸⁴ Cf. Geertz, C., The Interpretation of Cultures, New York: Basic Books, 1973, especially Ch. 4.

Equally, we think of values as a historical and evolutive phenomenon. It is there that they join our concept of tradition.

We see **tradition** as composed of two essential elements: the material to transmit and its transmission, expressed by: material to transmit + transmission = tradition.

Yoruba traditional values are expressed in Yoruba traditional cultural materials and the manner in which they have been constructed, maintained, modified or suppressed in time and space. Our studies will not only be synchronical but at the same time diachronical. For tradition and values are among those realities of human life which cannot defend or evaluate themselves with satisfaction if not in the perspective of a synthesis of the cultural life of the society in question⁸⁵. In agreement with Bujo⁸⁶, the incarnation of Christianity in Africa can only come about when it has been shown to the people of that Continent that the message of Jesus, far from destroying the cultural values of the people and their religion, provides it with a new, purifying and total stimulus. To achieve this, we must get beyond general questions, like the justification of African theology, or its aims and benefits; our task must be to bring together the fundamentals of both Christian faith and the African tradition, so that the Africans may find their own way in the resulting Christianity and feel at home therein.

Consequently, in this research, we identify marital and family issues as perhaps the most prominent situations common to this evident conflict of cultures. What resources are available to the pastor in this context and how can he or she effectively employ them? Can the traditional African sources and the Western ones brought by the rapid social change be complementary or must one be eliminated for the other?

Today in Africa the pastor cannot avoid the two worlds, the modern Western influence and the traditional African way, of facing issues of relationships and other related matters. To find any African community, no matter how remote it may be, which has not in one way or another been affected by a foreign touch would be a rare exception. At the same time we will discover that even in the big cities, which in some cases look like a completely different world in structure and lifestyle, people tend to form clusters according to their respective cultural origins and groupings. Some may for some time turn their backs on their villages of origin,

⁸⁵ Cf. Aligwekwe, P.E., The Continuity of Traditional Values in the African Society, Nigeria: Totan Publishers Ltd., 1991, p.10.

⁸⁶ Bujo, B., African Theology in its Social Context, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992, p.75.

but in the event of some family crisis, the general tendency would be to reflect on their roots and seek the co-operation of family members to give a helping hand.

1.3 The Purpose of the Thesis

We have so far scanned through the main thrust of African Church or Nigerian Church problems in the area of inculturation. We discover that the problems enumerated above are many and varied. There are yet a lot of virgin grounds to be covered in inculturation and it is not possible to cover all aspects of Inculturation in this research. Of all the problems and effects, none are more glaring than changes affecting human relations. I have therefore observed with eagerness and asked myself on several occasions how I can contribute my share in making those relationships what they are meant to be; more harmonious and constructive.

Since the family constitutes the nucleus of a given community, the interaction and direction of the community may be a reflection of the families that make up the group of people, and each family pattern may be governed by the marital relationships from which that family traces its background. Our main topic of the research therefore is “The Penetration of Catholic Christian Teachings on the Canonical Form about Marriage into Traditional Yoruba Culture: Inculturation as the way Forward”.

In view of the moral problems which threaten not only the Sacred Institution of marriage but also the practice of Christian faith in South-Western Nigeria, especially among the Yoruba ethnic group, we decided to undertake a scientific investigation aimed at unveiling the causes of the problems. This is done in order to propose means through which solutions to the problems could be found.

In this research, my aim, therefore is to highlight the problems inherent in the penetration of Catholic teachings on Canonical form about marriage into the traditional Yoruba culture of South-Western Nigeria. This is seen as an exercise in inculturation on the level of Theological Anthropology using the Yoruba cultural heritage as text for a practical pastoral approach. What cross-cultural witnesses need, I believe, is not a continuation of the current dichotomization of the theological and the anthropological perspectives but a single perspective in which the insights of each specialization are taken seriously at the same level. For both are human-made disciplines. And both disciplines suffer from the kind of “myopia” that all specialization leads to. Our theology, therefore, must be informed by anthropology and our anthropology informed by theology⁸⁷.

⁸⁷ Cf. Kraft, C.H., *Op. cit.* pp.117-118.

The term “inculturation” is a modified form of “enculturation” which is a technical term in Social Anthropology. In this discipline, “enculturation” means the process by which a person becomes informed by, and formed in a culture. It designates a process that involves growing up in a culture. In Sociology, this is also called “socialization”⁸⁸.

In theology, and as used in this thesis, “inculturation” denotes a process of creative interaction between the Christian faith and the gospel message on the one hand, and the religious and secular aspects of a people’s culture on the other, such that in the process, Christianity is re-interpreted and expressed in the light of the culture, and the culture is challenged and influenced by the Christian faith and the gospel message. The terms “adaptation”, “indigenization”, “Africanization”, and “Christianization”, according to Justin Ukpog, are its cognates and express in a general way different stages and aspects of what inculturation designates⁸⁹.

Inculturation takes on different nuances according to different contexts. As theological reflection (that is, inculturation theology), it means interpreting Christianity from the religio- and socio-cultural perspective and concrete life experience of a people, and the influencing of these with the vision of the Christian faith. It implies a particular framework of interpreting Christianity that admits of the reality of the spiritual and the sacred dimensions in life, and that sees these and the material and secular aspects of life as interrelated and interdependent.

In the context of evangelization, inculturation is an approach that seeks the proclamation of the good news to a people from within the perspective of their culture and social life experience in such a way as to actualize the saving power of the gospel and the Christian vision of life within the society in both its religious and secular spheres⁹⁰.

Inculturation constitutes a challenge to authoritarianism and exaggerated centralism in the Church. There can be no question according to Shorter that inculturation “assumes the existence of a multicultural, egalitarian Church, not one in which there are junior and senior partners. Inculturation implies that the particular Churches enjoy a relative autonomy - an

⁸⁸ Cf. Ary Roest-Crolius, "What is so New About Inculturation?", *Gregorianum* 59 (1978) pp.22-24.

⁸⁹ Ukpog, J.S., "The Nigerian Church and the Challenge of Inculturation" in *Essays in Contextual Theology*, Lagos: Campbell Publishers, 1995, p.123.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

autonomy in everything that does not endanger the bond of faith and communion guaranteed, among other things, by the Petrine ministry⁹¹. Ultimately, the Fathers of Vatican II foresaw the situation when they gave directives that local forms of canonical legislation have to be drawn up in order to make inculturation a reality⁹². A more flexible approach to law in the Church, particularly in all that pertains to decision-making structures, as well as to liturgy and marriage, is an essential condition for a multicultural Church.

Finally, from the perspective of practical Christian life, inculturation seeks to provide a dynamic orientation for integrating faith and daily living, and for interpreting reality in a way that is nurtured by the Christian faith.

Very often, inculturation is thought of in terms of liturgical and para-liturgical innovations only. Often too, such innovations are confined within the Church premises without their effects being carried over into daily life. If inculturation must fulfil its objective of transforming society and culture, then it must affect not only the religious but also the secular aspect of culture.

With this clarification, we come to the second aim of this study which is an attempt to investigate, describe and analyse not only the challenges that urbanisation poses for traditional held African norms in husband-wife relationships, but also some conceptual and social dilemmas that face African Catholic Christian couples in modern Nigeria and particularly among the Yoruba south-west as a result of the presence and message of Christianity in the country. The issue of husband-wife relationships is not unique to Nigeria. What is true of husband-wife relationships in Nigeria seems to be common in all other mission countries of sub-Sahara Africa. Young Christian couples are sandwiched between two seemingly opposing systems - African customary laws of marriage and the ecclesiastical or Biblical mandate for husband-wife relationships in marriage both of which demand allegiance.

In carrying out this "dialogue of love", efforts will be made to reconcile the Church's teachings on marriage with that found in the religio-cultural life of the Yoruba people. This problem has been created because the early missionaries failed to grapple with this problem in an objective way. They refused to recognize the way in which Africans have married from time immemorial. They failed to discover whether or not the customary marriage was a

⁹¹ Shorter, A., Toward a Theology of Inculturation, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988, p.259.

⁹² *Ad Gentes*, 19.

satisfactory system within the tribal or ethnic context because their study of African social institutions was concerned primarily with their relevance within the context of Christian religion wrapped up in Western cloak.

It is therefore the aim of this study to bring to light in an objective manner those positive African values which are inherent and vital for good family living and kinship. Efforts are equally made not to super-impose Western views and concepts on African marriage.

For Christianity and its teachings on marriage and family life to develop roots and stand up as “not an imported religion” which affects only superficially the lives of the people, “Africans must be prepared to do their own socio-religious research and respond theologically to their own social problems”. Africa itself must speak about something that lies at the heart of its own culture and of the Christian faith provided it is Christianity which has been established in the cultural roots of Africa.

The meeting of African culture and Christ's Church in the inculturating process of inserting the one into the other is to produce healthy mutual changes and developments. Christ will be seen to be given more meaning and the African culture undergoes a transformation in the areas that need purification. Such areas as in the uplifting of women and allowing them their rights as persons, elimination of superstitious fears, beliefs and practices, replacing inter-tribal suspicion and discrimination with Christian love and acceptance. In this last sense inculturation must play a prophetic role, criticising, purifying and transforming the inhuman elements of African culture.

Even today, on the part of Europeans, especially the white missionaries, the issue of canonical form of marriage for example, is becoming less cloudy. To this, Buhlmann succinctly remarked:

“We have, generally speaking, isolated the Sacrament of Marriage too much from life and made it too absolute. Significantly, in many places only the bridal couple and the witnesses come to Church, the others staying at home for the **PROPER** tribal marriage and to celebrate the feast. For us, the event of the sacramental life marks the moment when the unmarried state ends and the married state begins. In the tribe, a marriage is formed little by little. We used to think that only the Sacrament constituted the true marriage, but now we find this ‘marriage with a ring’ has in many cases become a mere European-style ceremony, that it does not correspond, in any unqualified sense, with what Christ meant by marriage, and that pagan marriage can just as well express love and truth between God and man. At all events, a marriage contracted according to tribal customs is, for an African, a valid

marriage, while a Christian marriage which ignores all native customs is worthless”⁹³.

An inculturated Yoruba marriage liturgy will be a way forward to get out of the canonical impasse that hampers the full integration of the Catholic Christians. Sharing this anxiety, Buhlmann further raises the question: “whether the canonical form of marriage could not be more adapted to local conditions; instead of being a complementary event separated from the traditional marriage contracted among Christians?”⁹⁴ This is the aim of this study.

It is equally the aim of this study to consider how couples could be helped to realise in an unparalleled vibrant manner the equality and complementarity of the husband and wife.

An ecclesiology which is really to speak to the people of Africa and particularly Yoruba, on marriage, must be grounded in the concept of their life. The pastors who learn from their experiences are privileged to re-examine in a practical way the meaning of salvation in Christ for the masses of Yoruba believers. A Church founded on canon law would be a bloodless and lifeless thing.

1.4 The Scope and Choice of Study

A study on the institution of marriage is very vast. Therefore, with reference to marriage in the Christian Church, our study will not include all its aspects. The scope of this research is exclusively limited to the traditional marriage practices among the Yoruba ethnic group of South-Western Nigeria but with special reference to the impact of catholic teachings on the canonical form.

In this regard, I begin by distancing myself from some of the common but inadequate understandings of marriage inculturation. For such people, inculturation means primarily finding suitable African or Nigerian symbols or rituals to express our Christian faith, especially in the areas of worship and catechesis. This understanding generally raises the further problem of evolving a Nigerian national liturgical rite similar, for instance, to the Zairean rite⁹⁵. Evolving a national liturgical rite remains impossible in Nigeria since the

⁹³ Buhlmann, W., The Coming of the Third Church, Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1976, p.312.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Cf. Ndiokwere, N.I., The African Church Today and Tomorrow Vol.II, Enugu, Nigeria: SNAPP Press, 1994, particularly chapter three.

country is made up of some 350 ethnic groups each with its own distinctive language and culture. The very impossibility of evolving a liturgy on marriage that will be truly expressive of these composite cultures, hence acceptable to all, discourages us from even embarking upon such a venture. This means that our examination of marriage practices is limited to only the Catholic Christians in Yorubaland. From the national population figures of twelve million Catholic Christians, the Yoruba Catholics numbered over two million⁹⁶. The location is the South-Western part of the country comprising the following states: Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Kwara and part of Kogi⁹⁷.

Our investigation therefore involves the whole of Yorubaland as a geographical entity and not just a given restricted segment. This is because it was the entire area that was evangelized as a unit for reasons of its homogeneity in language, culture and world-view. Thus a picture of an homogenous group is presented here.

Although there are other reasons responsible for the moral problems, our objective in this research is to give an assessment of the institution of marriage and the family practices of the Catholic Christians of the Yorubaland in Nigeria. Although many books and articles have been written on the theme "Marriage and the Family among the Yoruba", so far, each writer has approached it from the point of view most appealing to him. The studies, in general, could be said to complement one another as they afford us a multi-dimensional view of the same topic. For example, Edward Ward⁹⁸ stresses the male-dominated decision in marriage. Felix Ajiboye⁹⁹ provides a privileged place for the items of marriage but conspicuously leaves out an important sign of consent. Nicholas Okesola¹⁰⁰, focuses on child-bearing as a hub of a

⁹⁶ Catholic Church Directory, Op. cit. 1995.

⁹⁷ See appendix on the geographical areas covered.

⁹⁸ Ward, E., "Marriage among the Yoruba" in The Catholic University of American Anthropological Series, No.4. Washington D.C., 1937.

⁹⁹ Ajiboye, A.D., Yoruba Culture and the Christian Doctrine of Marriage, *Theses ad doctoratum in S. Theologia*, Roma: Pontificia Universitas Lateranense, 1980.

¹⁰⁰ Okesola, N.B., Yoruba Traditional Marriage in the Light of Indissolubility of Christian Marriage, *Theses ad Licentia in S. Theologia*, Roma: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 1982.

lasting marriage. Joseph Ogunduyilemi¹⁰¹ accents the sexta-facet consent sign of marriage that brings a couple face-to-face with the two mothers who are to become mothers-in-law where mutual consent exists. Fadipe¹⁰² focuses his studies on the sociology of the Yoruba family. But we have observed that the area of inculturation of the traditional marriage has not been offered as much attention and consideration as it deserves. The non-existence of such a study has been a motivation for choosing to present such a study for the requirements of the doctoral programme.

1.5 Research Methodology

Perhaps it is pertinent to reiterate at this point again the aim of this research. The aim is to analyse marriage and family life among the Catholic Yorubas of South-Western Nigeria from a practical pastoral/liturgical perspective. The Yoruba understanding of marriage is undoubtedly to be numbered among those customs and usages which must be integrated into the Christian tradition so that the modern Catholic couples may find their own way in the resulting Christianity and feel at home therein.

Many factors are involved in the study of Yoruba and indeed African thought and culture today. The very subject of their thought and culture touches directly on the question of their life. Each generation encounters culture with its own problems. Some of such problems as Oliver Onwubiko puts it "are perennial and transcend each generation, its conception of culture and its attitude to life itself as influenced by its history and experience"¹⁰³. In the past, African thought and culture have been so patterned and wrapped in Western philosophical thoughts. We are in accord with Umoren who says that Philosophy (either Western or African) can no longer be seen as the sole provider of the instruments for articulating Christian thought and practice¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰¹ Ogunduyilemi, J.T., The Mothers-In-Law among the Yorubas and the Stability of the Christian Family: A Pastoral Suggestion, *Theses ad doctoratum in S. Theologia*, Roma: Pontificia Universitas Lateranense, 1983.

¹⁰² Fadipe, N.A., The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan: University Press, 1970.

¹⁰³ Onwubiko, O.A., African Thought, Religion and Culture, Vol.1., Enugu, Nigeria: SNAPP Press, 1991.

¹⁰⁴ Umoren, U.E., "Socio-Cultural Anthropology and the Methodology of Inculturation in Africa" in Journal of

In this thesis, emphasis is placed on the use of social anthropological methods in the study of traditional Yoruba culture to identify religio-cultural categories used in interpreting the Christian message about marriage.

It is pertinent to say here that the use of social anthropological methods in the study of any African culture has a lot of limitations. Most of the limitations are based on the biased nature of the methodology initially. The first attempt therefore in the study of the various cultures of Africa was made by Christian missionaries and colonial officers who concentrated their efforts on the identification of the various ethnic and sub-ethnic groups which inhabited a given colonial territory. They gathered information designed to facilitate subversive "civilizing missions". Thus, one of the greatest problems which confronts the study of African culture is the enunciation of a creative methodology. A survey of past methodologies indicates that whites have fashioned Africa according to their own image and to suit their own interests¹⁰⁵. Christian missionaries in their invincible if not inculpable anthropological ignorance of the Africans, conceived or seemed to have conceived their mission as that of imparting not only the Christian religion but also culture and civilization - the Western civilization. The missionaries were convinced of the immense superiority of the Western culture which Africa, as a cultural "*tabula rasa*", must wholly absorb if it is to be rescued from the claws of paganism, savagery, barbarism and superstition. Such was the mentality of the early missionaries in Africa who did not penetrate the mind and culture of the Africans. This cultural arrogance and superiority complex were definitely responsible for the strife between African culture and Westernized Christian institutions and values¹⁰⁶.

Initially, social anthropology was defined simply as the study of primitive peoples. So, from the onset, social anthropology as a methodology was biased. For instance, if one employed the Western theories like the functionalist theory of social change, the tendency would be to urge that change in Africa could only occur by gradual transformation. Nevertheless, I would not wish to maintain that the missionaries were wholly wrong in this

Inculturation Theology., CIWA Port-Harcourt, Nigeria, Vol.2 No.1, April 1995, p.4.

¹⁰⁵ Nwosu, H.N., and Kalu, O.U., (ed), "The Study of African Culture" in African Cultural Development, Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978, p.12.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Iwe, N.S., Christianity and Culture, Onitsha, Nigeria: University Publishing Co., 1975, p.27.

field. Corrections to the tradition were needed. But the damage done to the balance of the traditional societies by the wholesale condemnation of the religious and social structure was often disastrous¹⁰⁷.

This kind of methodology gave birth to "collective reflectors" mainly by Africans on the colonial situation rather than to "creative" African thinkers; to writers who tended to counteract rather than to interact; to men who reacted rather than acted in the new cultural situations. They were led by the colonial programmes, from the feeling of cultural inferiority to counter-cultural complex. This was because they were mainly concerned with refuting the assertions of one type of study on African culture, religion and thought¹⁰⁸. This type of study assumed that African beliefs, cultural characteristics, and behavioural patterns were sub-human, and when it accepted anything human in the African way of life, it credited it to outside influence¹⁰⁹. For example, official action by the missionary anthropologists in promoting the Christian ideal of marriage was never indirectly or directly related in principle to what missions had learned about African indigenous marriage. The primary relationship of principle has always been to the Christian ideal. Hence, according to Arthur Phillips *et al.*, "within the tribal context it has not constituted the normal objective for missionary study of African life and custom. Whether or not customary marriage is a satisfactory system within the tribal context has always been irrelevant to the missionary aim"¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Balandier, G., The Sociology of the Black Africa, America: Passim Press, 1970.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Blyden, E.W., African Life and Customs, London: African Publication Society, 1969, pp.30ff. Blyden, as an apologist, defended African personality by stressing the spiritual advantage of the Africans as antidote to the materialism of the West. He asserts that the African way of life was, in many ways, superior to that of the European. He was not alone in this bid, a lot of early African scholars subscribed to his idea. Some even renounced whatever was not African like foreign names and dress. See the preamble to this chapter on Mojola Agbebi's contention.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Onwubiko, O.A., *Op. cit.* p.xii.

¹¹⁰ Phillips, A., (ed), Survey of African Marriage and Family Life, London: Oxford University Press, 1953, p.332.

Nonetheless, with the development in political independence of African countries in the recent times, the study of anthropology has taken a new turn and given rise to “Native” Anthropology. In other words, today’s social anthropologists are no longer interested in change as an item of behaviour but in change in the entire social structure as the “primitive societies” disappeared as a result of their incorporation into the larger territorial states¹¹¹. This has offered Africans a good opportunity in the objective study of African culture and thought today. Native Anthropology advocates the study and documentation of a culture by insiders. An anthropologist like Lofland has argued in favour of beginning a research within one’s group or settings¹¹².

There are, of course, advantages and disadvantages to this method. Being a member of the ethnic group in study and as a pastor, the question of the objectivity of the study could be argued. Being a Yoruba myself, I could not help being somewhat immersed in the situation, as I have found it natural so far to take on the role of a native speaker. It may not be easy to assume completely the attitude of the impartial anthropologist who ‘observes’ or takes part in a ritual in order to learn about it. I am not approaching the reality of this research as a *tabula rasa* as noted earlier in the presentation of the research problem. There may be a danger in my situation in that, whereas my intention has been objectively to describe actions and words, I may have in some places been unable to avoid essentially Yoruba value judgements. An advantage of my situation however has been that at least the exegetical level of meaning is not in doubt.

This method is employed in view of the fact that traditional Yoruba religion and culture form the base on which Christianity is built. This approach therefore covers an important area of concern in inculturation theology. Accordingly, a major component of the anthropological perspective of ethnographic field work was employed in the research. The dissertation attempts to describe and present the marriage situation, as concretely as possible, and as lived by the Yorubas within their socio-cultural setting before and after the advent of Christianity/Westernization and the cultural clashes that have set in as a result of the encounter.

¹¹¹ Cf. Mair, L., New Nations, London: Weiden, Feld & Nicholson, 1969, pp.16-17.

¹¹² Lofland, J. and Lofland, Lyn, H., Analyzing Social Settings, 2nd. (ed.)., New York: Wadsworth, 1984.

Another area of critique could be the presentation of a pastoral problem using anthropological methodologies. There is no simple answer to such a critique, but in this research, I have employed the anthropological methodology because I have been trained as a social anthropologist. It is therefore my believe that an anthropologically informed approach, however, identifies as the constants of Christianity the functions and meanings behind cultural forms, rather than any given set of doctrinal or behavioural forms. It would leave the cultural forms in which these constant functions are expressed largely negotiable in terms of the cultural matrix of those with whom God is dealing at the time¹¹³.

However, it is to be noted here that no one methodology is adequate enough for the type of research I am embarking on; other methodologies too have equally been employed to complement the main methodology used. And as such our method, though essentially ethical, is at the same time pastoral, expository, analytical, and sociological. It is also theological, historical and comparative since it is considering the concrete situation of contemporary marriage as well as comparing systematically the importance attached to marriage preparation and its living experience in Yoruba tradition with Canon 1063¹¹⁴ in the present Code of Canon Law.

It is pertinent to state also that a lot of mission studies today favour the use of anthropology in understanding the relationship between the Church, culture and religion¹¹⁵. The insistence today on proper understanding of the relationship between the Church, culture and religion has contributed immensely to the success of Christian mission within the last century. Series of Christian missions insist today that bi-cultural education must be balanced by trans-cultural education which aims at impressing on people that the Christian religion and faith transcends all cultures while doing their mission of evangelizing them without destroying them¹¹⁶.

¹¹³ Cf. Kraft, C.H., Op. cit. p.118.

¹¹⁴ Canon 1063: Pastors of souls are obliged to ensure that their own Church community provides for Christ's faithful assistance by which the married state is preserved in its Christian character and develops in perfection.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Onwubiko, A.O., Op. cit.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Turner, V.W., "Ritual Symbolism, Morality and Social Structure among the Ndembu", Rhodes-Livingstone Journal, No.30, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961; Allen, R., Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?

In order to put into perspective the understanding of the relationship between the Catholic Church's teachings on the canonical form of marriage over the traditional marriage practices of the Yoruba, a few tentative questions were raised and attempted as a guide to our research. These questions are: "What is the Catholic Church's teaching on the canonical form of marriage and family?" "Are these teachings relevant to the marriage practices of the Yoruba?" "What are the theological and ethical adequacy of these teachings when compared with traditional Yoruba values and the day to day experience of couples?" "What are the factors responsible for the evolving changes in family values?" "Are these changes inevitable given the socio-contextual factors?" "Are they desirable, given the Catholic Church's and the Yoruba traditional vision of an ideal social and human relationship?" "Why the relative rootedness if any or disjunctiveness of young couples in their Church's doctrinal teachings?" "What are the factors responsible for their possible disaffection with those teachings?" "Do they perceive the relevance of those teachings to their present situation with the customary demands?" "Can we make out a link between the changes occurring in the Church and those in the larger society with respect to the decline or upsurge of religiosity?" "Do these teachings provide procedures for meeting crisis and explanations for otherwise unexplainable occurrences in the life of these couples?"

The questions are open-ended as developed to test the main themes of the study, viz.

- (i) Family: their roles, duties, limitations and cohesion;
- (ii) Couple: the new family - problems they encounter, coping strategies employed to meet up the traditional demands and Christian demands, pressures from the family;
- (iii) Church: role of the Church in the marital life of the members; the relevance of the Church and of the pastor or priest in the day-to-day well being of the union and the right of arbitration in case of misunderstanding or quarrel;
- (iv) Society: what impact, especially on the issues where the demand of the gospel and culture is at variance with new norms e.g. on divorce, sexuality and trial marriages;

A basic approach in all of these methods is to evaluate a culture without prejudice but not without bias. So for effective study of Yoruba culture in this research, I have taken onboard some major factors:

Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co. (Reprint. ed.), 1962; Arbuckle, G., Earthing the Gospel, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990.

- (i) A highly emphatic power to enter into emotional harmony with the traits of a particular culture (Yoruba) so as to appreciate its work of art and to perceive with satisfaction their native aesthetics and natural values;
- (ii) A balanced sympathetic sense of human worth which helps me to see the intrinsic values of life as expressed in a culture which may differ with, or even contradict some of my previous inherited assumption of the Yoruba culture;
- (iii) The ability to admit the limitations imposed, unconsciously by my own cultural world-view and thus be disposed to learn from others the meanings and understandings they have of their cultural values and thereby minimize my ethnocentric vision of the assumed Yoruba culture;
- (iv) A developed sense of dialogue and power of communication, sustained by the enthusiasm for the culture and the desire to transfer these to others.

Our sources have come principally from, firstly, the information we have gathered and the studies we have done, during a three year ethnographic research and ten-months of field work in the Yoruba society. Our visits to the region, in the interest of our subject, included a long visit, in 1994-95, of nine months, in which we sensed, by a living experience in a Lagos metropolitan city, the extent to which resemblances and differences existed between the external European social comportment and those of an African people (the Yoruba people)¹¹⁷.

The field study took place between August 1994 and May 1995. It was a politically grim time in Nigeria. It had become obvious, following the annulment of the June 1993 Presidential election by the then military regime, that the country was heading for a period of political turbulence. It was therefore no great surprise that Nigeria had two changes of government in the second half of 1993 alone. The present government has itself existed amidst rumours of coups and counter coups.

At several points in 1994, Nigeria was in a near-anarchic state. The country reeled from the following events:

- (i) Court cases challenging the legality of the government;

¹¹⁷ It is essential to know that the researcher himself, is a native, Yoruba-born, brought up in the Yoruba society. His absence from the country for two-and-a-half years before this thesis allowed him to look at the society from the exterior, to be able to make objective comparisons.

(ii) Acts of civil disobedience and public demonstrations against the government, organized largely by pro-democracy activists. I found myself in the middle of some of those demonstrations;

(iii) An openly hostile press and population, made increasingly so by the trial for treason of the acclaimed winner, (Chief M.K.O. Abiola), of the 1993 Presidential election, who had in June 1994, unilaterally declared himself "President". The furore in the press led to the proscription of three national newspapers during the duration of the field study;

(iv) Successive strikes by teachers, students, local government employees, market women, medical personnel, transporters and at least six trade unions including two oil workers' unions.

The strikes varied from snap twenty-four hour strikes to a long drawn out strike in excess of ten weeks;

(v) Looting, arson, and several violent clashes between different ethnic groups, and also between groups of Police and other armed personnel on the one hand, and angry civilians on the other hand. While these had occurred sporadically throughout the year, they intensified greatly after Chief Abiola's proclamation in June 1994. We witnessed several such occurrences in various parts of Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Kwara, Oyo and Ondo states (all the Yoruba speaking states) from where the presidential candidate comes;

Expectedly, Nigeria's political circumstances at this period affected the field work activities, but not as much as we had feared.

This long visit in spite of the initial political problems mentioned, enabled us to carry out a research programme intended to enable us penetrate into the Yoruba system of thought - a field work based on the study of the substance of the oral tradition, the cultural functions of the native language, the traditional notion of marriage and the socio-economico-politico-religious institutions which best express the ideology and the social norms of the people.

Our desire to carry out research at the level of participant observation was fully realised. Besides, we were well placed to have contact with the young generations of the society as well as with the elites and the directors of the modern Yoruba society.

The second visit during November-December 1995, was a short stay of six weeks as a continuation of the field work by putting finishing touches and clarity to some of the data collected during the first trip and reintegrating ourselves totally into the society. Generally speaking, our information was gathered from a spectrum of people among the Yoruba society.

These categories include: married couples at different stages of their marriage; couples who are Catholic members, married in the Yoruba traditional way; ministers of both Catholic

Church and other Christian Churches some of whom are bishops, priests, nuns, catechists and other lay faithful functionaries who are involved in marriage preparations of various couples; lay organizations of the Church like the Youth organization, the league of Christian mothers and the Laity council. We equally interviewed a few traditional worshippers and believers.

In all, a total number of two-hundred and thirty-five people were interviewed while we observed about six different traditional weddings during the period bringing together a population of over five thousand people from all works of life. This enabled us to compare notes against the Church weddings.

On the other hand, we equally witnessed over twenty Catholic Christian marriages. Some of the marriages are those from the Yoruba ethnic group while others are of different ethnic background and inter-Christian marriage affiliations but who live and work within the Yoruba nation. In this way we accumulated systematic and reliable knowledge on Yoruba culture, human diversity and commonality, cultural barriers as well as stimulants for change and the nature of their cultural integration. Such empirical data are indispensable for this project of inculturation.

Finally, our research stretched on as far as the areas indigenous to the Yorubas called 'Yoruba Cultural Areas' from the fact that they contain aspects of the Yoruba culture difficult to be found in a distinct form elsewhere. A tour guide of the places visited was drawn up prior to the field trip and was adhered to as much as possible; and is acknowledged in the appendix¹¹⁸.

From August to May of 1994-95, the researcher lived in Regina Mundi Catholic Parish, Mushin in Lagos metropolis, the erstwhile capital of Nigeria and of the whole country, where he visited and interviewed families, couples, Church dignitaries and other people within the society. We made use of tape recording and video camcorder, in addition to field notes and diary.

¹¹⁸ As a prelude to the exercise, a tour guide plan was drawn to include all the Yoruba speaking areas where Christianity has taken root for over a century; heritage of religious community, homogeneity of colonial history and Cosmopolitan ethnic group. The sample area covered are the states of modern Nigeria of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Kwara and Kogi. Cf. Appendix.

Multiple case-studies have been employed in this study as they emerged in the field work, more for analytic than statistical generalization. We relied, as earlier mentioned, mainly on interviews and observations for their construction.

In addition to this, we made use in a special manner of library and archival documents necessary to complete, on several occasions, the information we collected in our fieldwork. Such an approach furnished us with some indispensable historical backings to facilitate the explanations of the evolutive phenomena or the synthesis of events and of ideas, as they were expressed in the society.

We know very well how limited oral traditions are. Our informants could not, naturally, recall or remember everything; neither did they live nor see everything. The documentations of historical, archaeological, ethnographical and archival materials were imperative to us as these services were needed to fill up gaps and omissions.

The following documents were very useful to us: official reports, statistics, sociological and theological articles and journals and other related documentaries on Yoruba history and marriage practices on one hand, and on the other, that of Christian practices.

From the research findings, all human beings share a common set of basic needs like marriage, food etc. but the means and ways of meeting these needs vary from culture to culture. The basic anthropological categories employed by the Yoruba as a group to identify their cultural traits were easily discovered and brought to light during the ten-months of field work. Such common systems involve: language, social organization, technology, economic organization, political organization, art and religion/ideology¹¹⁹. All these interconnecting areas of life of the Yoruba people were taken together and they form the basis of our study.

To this end, we analyse the content of the present marriage practices and kinship, and the impact of globalization and Westernization on the Yoruba family, but equally probe into the historical, cultural and social economic conditions which have led to the different kind of arrangements of family system in Nigeria today and particularly among the Catholic Christian Yoruba groups.

¹¹⁹ Peter Hammond made use of these common categories in his book on Cultural and Social Anthropology. Cf. P.Hammond, An Introduction to Cultural and Social Anthropology, pp.12-13.

1.6 Significance

I am motivated to study this subject as an insider of the Yoruba ethnic group and a pastor. My pastoral experience with some Yoruba Catholic Christian families has been the strongest force behind the conception of this topic and their sincerity, frankness and objectivity during the field work have been a source of courage in the pursuit of this research. Apart from being a presentation of cultural beliefs, practices and history of a group within the Catholic Church in Yorubaland, this study could also be a useful instrument of evangelisation for the present-day pastors, researchers and apostolic workers.

It aims at incarnating the Gospel within a cultural milieu. Through this work, the people will be able to look at themselves before the advent of Christianity/Westernization and thereby rediscover their original identity and distinguish it from their present identity. This distinction could help in re-focusing and re-appropriating Christian messages and values among the Yoruba and indeed in the Continent of Africa.

A re-interpretation of the past is highly necessary in order to be able to discuss the present, to see the coherence between the past and the present, and to plan for the future. For if civilisations, just like humanity themselves, must decline and die, should not the present be born of the past and the future of the present?¹²⁰. The question then arises: if the Church is struggling in her pastoral life, to build up families in Christ, would it not be more effective to pay more attention to the cultural crisis that may become a stumbling block to the stability of the Christian families, especially in the areas like Yorubaland where such adherence to traditions and culture is still very much alive and imperative? Our task of bringing together the fundamentals of both Christian faith and the African tradition in this thesis may help the Africans find their own way in the resulting Christian ethos and feel at home.

1.7 The Structure of the Thesis

The work is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one presents the general introduction of the thesis. Here, we present the research problems, the aims and objectives of the research, the research methodology employed to fulfil the aims and objectives, the scope and limitations of the study, and the significance of such a study.

Chapter two is divided into two parts with the first part presenting the background of the Yoruba people, the myth of origin and history, and the interplay of environmental factors

¹²⁰ Camara-Laye, *The Guardian of the Word*, London: Fontana Collins, 1980, p.16.

in the community: the structural organization of the Yoruba people with particular reference to the role of Obaship in the traditional Yoruba society, the village heads and the ward heads.

The position and role of obaship is given a considerable analytical part in this thesis as a practical and pastoral implication of our comparative investigation into leadership structure in the Catholic Church. Just as in many parts of Africa, there exists in Yorubaland a gigantic structural organization of parishes which does not give sufficient room for effective administration and for the active participation of the married couples in the evangelical and pastoral life of the 'ecclesia' community. The structures are so big that they do not permit the people to express and experience their traditional interpersonal dimension of solidarity within the community. Such a large structural organization is quite unfamiliar to the Yoruba traditional community, whose structure demands an active involvement of every individual in the life and activities of the community. We therefore align with some African writers to affirm that "the big hierarchical organization of the mission Churches appears largely unfamiliar and unadaptable to the needs of the people at that level"¹²¹. These writers not only lament the "high position" of the Church leaders in many parts of Africa, but they also refer to the fact that the parishes are too large and too centralised for the faithful to participate actively in the evangelical and pastoral functions of the Church.

An adaptation of the Yoruba institutional structure as a model for building up "small Christian communities" in various parishes and dioceses will not only be close to the Yoruba concept of the community but will also provide a favourable Christian milieu for the Yoruba Christians to share their faith and life experiences together and be personally committed to one another as one family in the Lord where the joys and anxieties of one become that of the other.

The extended family system is thoroughly X-rayed as the basic family unit that it is. The positive values of this and the factors of its decline before and after the advent of Christianity/Westernization are alluded to.

The second part examines the Yoruba culture from the point of contact with other cultures namely, Western Nations under the umbrella of colonial experience and the missionary activities in the traditional Yoruba society. Areas of change in the inter-cultural contact are highlighted.

The third chapter examines the notion of marriage among the Yoruba and the importance attached to marriage preparation in their traditional setting. It thus takes a critical

¹²¹ Kisebo, B., et al. African Christian marriage, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1977, p.207.

look at Yoruba marriage traditions, the age-long practices and the changes brought about as the result of their contact with other cultures which have had a tremendous influence on their socio-economic conditions. Chapter four treats the understanding and the development of the Catholic Christian marriage, its theology and the teachings of the Church on marriage with particular respect to the canonical form. It looks briefly on the various stages of development in the understanding of marriage and the eventual Church's rubber-stamp on vital aspects of marriage such as the canonical form, the covenantal and sacramental aspect, the consent and conjugal acts founded on love.

In chapter five the points of conflict between the Yoruba traditionally-held tenets on marriage and Christian/Western are examined as well as the similarities between Yoruba culture and Christian traditions. The sharp disagreement on the Church's teaching on monogamy and other major doctrines led to the emergence of various indigenous Churches. This is equally examined. The pastoral difficulties are also examined. The choice of civil laws by some Christian couples/families in preference to Church doctrines or the Canon Law especially when neither culture nor religion support their actions is equally examined. Thus both culture and religion contend with secularism in the city person who has become alienated from his roots and distant to the Scripture on family and marital issues.

Chapter six draws together all the concepts and conclusions that were highlighted in the previous chapters. This helps to chart a path to a distinct proposal for the pastoral care of the Yoruba Catholic Christian families at all levels. An inculturated Yoruba marriage rite based on "tripartite coagulation theory" of partnership between the individual, the Church, and the family is suggested as a way forward in integrating both cultures. New perspectives are projected and a drive is suggested for the harmonisation of the positive values in Yoruba/Western culture and Church doctrine.

The seventh chapter summarises the entire thesis and proposes specific areas for further research.

1.8 General Notes

In this thesis, efforts have been made to give adequate translation to enhance thorough understanding. However, there are words, especially names which may be literally translated and those which may not be adequately translated.

There are a few untranslated words. These arose mainly out of the fact that they are words whose origin are archaic, and unfamiliar to those contemporary speakers interviewed or

those whose place in recitations is to give flavour to wordplay - e.g. pekele-pekele (the way it sounds).

1.9 Concepts

Concepts are issues related to the language, art and culture of the people and these are thoroughly reflected in law, religion and socio-economic activities.

The concepts of *Baba* (father) for instance or *Iyekan* have a different connotation in English language; e.g. “*Ajeje owo kan ko gbegba dori*” meaning ‘a hand cannot successfully place a calabash on the head’; i.e. team work cannot be handled singly. The reader is thus advised to be accommodating in the use and reference to these.

Throughout the thesis, the concepts and references are those of the Yoruba and they are as expressed. Where approximate English word/concepts are available, adequate notes point to these and are duly indicated.

1.10 Spellings

Spellings of Yoruba words, names and towns are according to standard orthography. *Dosumu* is spelt *Docemo* by the Portuguese and is still spelt so to date. *Otta* and *Offa* are still spelt so by colonialists against *Ota*, *Ofa*. The earlier writers chose *sh* instead of *s* and *aiye* instead of *aye* (earth).

The field of study is the geographical area occupied by the Yoruba. There are maps to show their historical location, colonial administrative and political maps and those reflecting the 30 state structures with population figures.

Mushin is a local government area in Lagos state. It is an indigenous settlement with very high density of population and its population is authentically Yoruba in comparison to places like *Ikoyi*, a government reserved area accommodating all comers and *Ajegunle* which has a noticeable presence of *Ibos* (an ethnic group in south-eastern Nigeria) or *Agege* with noticeable *Hausas* (a northern ethnic group in Nigeria) percentage in the population.

The Regina Mundi (formerly St. Michael's) is one of the oldest Catholic Churches in the arch-diocese of Lagos.

2. CHAPTER TWO: THE YORUBA NATION BEFORE AND AFTER CONTACT WITH OTHER CULTURES

2.1 *Preamble*

The revolutionary change in people's way of life in modern times, which for several centuries was confined to the Western peoples, has today come to affect all the countries and nations of the world. Within the past three decades or so, a universal pattern of modernity is emerging from the wide diversity of traditional values and institutions, and peoples of all nations are confronted with the challenge of defining their attitudes toward fundamental changes that are world-wide in scope.

The achievements of humanity in the modern age have provided unprecedented opportunities for human welfare and fulfilment, but they have also placed in the hands of humanity instruments of universal destruction.

When one takes a cursory look at African countries today, the sheer rapidity of urban growth remains one of the most astonishing and awesome aspects of the whole process of social change. This is evidenced in the increase and influx of populations in most of the cities of Africa. In the Lagos metropolis of Nigeria alone, there is a recorded population of over five million people¹²². Further evidence is seen from the upsurge in the various census figures of a host of other African countries.

The city has thus become the symbol of political, social, cultural, and moral emancipation. Under its influence the outline of the future society is being shaped, and still remains the greatest threat to traditional social patterns and institutions.

This whole dynamic force of urbanisation in these African countries is not unconnected with their encounter with the Western world. For example, the initial contact of the Yorubas through commerce with the Portuguese traders along the coastal lines in the 17th Century opened up avenues for the development of new commercial centres and towns and thus consequently altered the existing structures in the traditional Yoruba family and

¹²² The brief facts of this were collected from the National Population Commission's Office in Lagos in February 1995 during the field survey. See appendix on population figures.

society¹²³. It is the scene of the dynamic encounter with the West and its life that manifests the struggle of these young nations to discover the cultural foundations of a new social order, using the techniques of the West while preserving a non-western ambience. It provides the actual setting in which words like nationalism, freedom, individualism, and progress take on reality and power.

Peter Abrecht has perceived the city as having the ambiguous characteristic quality of all change. According to him this is clearly perceived from the areas of demoralizing social conditions, uprootedness, and human misery; of new wealth in contrast to mass poverty and insecurity, and consequently of new social tensions and injustice; of impersonal economic forces and indiscriminate materialism¹²⁴. Paradoxically, the new cities of Africa embody the two sides of rapid social change: the hopeful, dynamic, and creative, on one side and the chaotic, inhuman, and destructive on the other side. Nowhere is the "shock" of social change so evident as in this movement of people to the large urban areas.

The research of various African scholars shows that there were "manifold variations" in the relation between traditional African culture and Western innovations. Not only have certain customs and beliefs been discarded or modified, but some have been retained by one level of society at the same time as new alternatives were being accepted on another level¹²⁵. Thus, according to Afigbo's description, "while human sacrifice, the slave trade, and the killing of twins have been discarded, and old and new ideas have been amalgamated in the sphere of religion; the European ideal of monogamous marriage accepted by the Christianized elite side by side under law with the institution of polygamy among the urban and rural masses"¹²⁶. Lending weight to ideas like that of Kalu, Ade Ajayi has also given the example of the African who:

¹²³ Ballong, J.B., Le Role de Sao Tome dans l'Etablissement et le Developpement du Commerce Portugais dans le Golfe de Guinee aux XV et XVI siecles, Paris, 1990, pp.159-160.

¹²⁴ Abrecht, P., The Churches and Rapid Social Change, London: SCM Press, 1961.

¹²⁵ Cf. Ajayi, J.F.A., Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891, London: Longman, 1965; Kimble, D., A Political History of Ghana, 1850-1928, London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

¹²⁶ Afigbo, A.E., "Education, Urbanization and Social Change in Colonial Africa" in Ogbu-Kalu (ed.) Readings in

“gets himself baptized a Christian, sends his children to school, comes to terms with modern technology by buying a lorry and learning to drive it, and yet insists that the lorry is not just a mechanical device but also a force whose control properly belongs to the god of iron whose emblems and charms he therefore displays on the lorry”¹²⁷.

The fact is that Africans were probably not unaware of the elementary fact that the acceptance of “new forms may only increase the range of alternatives available to them”¹²⁸. In the light of the foregoing discussion, therefore, one can subscribe to the view that there is no African culture which was not affected by European contact or which has completely crumbled before it. In studying social change in Africa under colonial rule the task of scholarship is thus not to repeat the myth of the displacement of indigenous cultures by European values and forms. Rather, it is to determine and analyse the extent and mechanism of change and adjustment within each integral social unit, and to compare and contrast any findings made with what is obtained in neighbouring societies. This chapter is therefore situated in the context of this mechanism of cultural and social changes within traditional Yoruba society.

We set out to examine the Yoruba ethnic group with particular reference to their land, origin, and culture before and after their contact with European/Western cultures.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part deals with their life and cultures as earlier mentioned before the advent of Westernization/Christianity. In doing this, we have made use of historical methodology in the exposition of who the Yoruba are. With the historical methodology employed here, we introduce our readers to the background and life of this people so that they will be able to understand their history and culture.

Historical analysis of this kind provides the most vital approach necessary for understanding the Yoruba institutions and even attitudes, values and behaviour in the political

African Humanities, Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978, p.130.

¹²⁷ Ajayi, J.F.A., "The Continuity of African Institutions Under Colonialism", in T. Ranger, ed., Emerging Themes of African History, London, 1968, pp. 191-192.

¹²⁸ Cf. Gusfield, J.R., "Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change", in J.L., Finkle, and R.W., Cable, eds. Political Development and Social Change, New York, 1971, p.19.

process. Historical study enables us to see how what is has come to be what it is. While this does not amount to a prediction of what it will turn into, the knowledge of how it has evolved is most important for anyone trying to forecast or trying to influence the lines of change.

Our sources of collection here are oral and written/documented data. For the oral collections, we interviewed a spectrum of Yoruba elders and historians. The Yoruba people believe that the elders in their society are the true custodians of traditions and customs¹²⁹. In this realm, we travelled round some principal Yoruba historic cities and towns like Ile-Ife, the cradle of Yorubaland, Ibadan, Oyo, Ekiti and Kwara to interview people and observe some of their customary practices. We have also presented a few case-studies that emerged to us while carrying out the field survey.

For the documented data, we were able to compare the oral sources obtained through interviews and observations with the already documented data on the same people and society in form of historical writings in the areas of our research. We therefore, tried to strike a balance between what we were told, observed and read on the subject of our study.

The second part looks at the impact of other cultural contact on the Yoruba - their traditional family structures and culture from the perspective of Colonisation and Christianisation/Westernization.

The process of evangelization and Christianization in Yorubaland brought the Yoruba and European cultures into contact. Both cultures experienced reciprocal shocks. However, the Yoruba culture suffered greater disadvantages from this shock. The waves of missionary activities and Westernization have cast a stifling shadow over some of the cultural values of the Yorubas. These are now in a hard struggle for survival.

We therefore describe, examine, and analyse not only the challenges that Westernized form of urbanisation poses as a result of culture contact with the traditional held African norms in husband-wife relationships, but also look into some conceptual and social dilemmas that face Yoruba Catholic Christian couples as a result of the presence and message of Christianity and Westernization in their nation. In this regard, two of the major inroads of Westernization among the Yorubas are examined, namely: Colonisation and the Missionary influence or enterprise.

¹²⁹ The Yoruba adage says: "*Enu agba ni Obi ngbo si*" - 'an elder in a community has the last say because he/she is the custodian of Yoruba custom'.

2.2 The Yoruba Nation

2.2.1 Their Land and People

The word "Nigeria" has been in vogue since 1897 to designate the entire area surrounding the Niger River, in which Yorubaland was also included. But the entire country came to be officially called Nigeria in 1914 when Southern and Northern Nigeria were amalgamated¹³⁰.

Yorubaland is situated between the parallels 5.86⁰ and 9.22⁰ north, and between 2.65⁰ and 5.72⁰ east of the Equator¹³¹. It is located in the tropics with two major seasons - dry and wet, October to April and May to October respectively. The location is supportive of agriculture, commerce and trade. Except for the periods of the intensive inter-tribal wars, trade flourished at the major Yoruba trading centres. The road hinterland was closely guarded by the Ijebus; Ejirin, a southern trading post; Oyingbo, a coastal market; Ajase (Portnovu), Akesan, Oje, Aponmu and Iwere-Ile were very prominent markets.

Industries are reflective of the environmental factors - weaving for which Iseyin is prominent, carvings, black-smithing, iron-smithing and brass work, oil-palm, dyeing and soap making were all major commercial products of the Yoruba.

The Yoruba people spread over three main countries in West Africa: namely Nigeria, Benin Republic and Togo. Some Yorubas can also be found in some part of Latin America and the Caribbean¹³². However, the largest concentration is found in Nigeria where they are, by the 1991 population census, about twenty million people¹³³. Thus our focus here is on the

¹³⁰ INTERNATIONAL WORLD PROFILE, Nigeria Magazine, in U.S. World Journal, 16/12 (1990) 6. The word "Nigeria", to designate the entire area surrounding the Niger River, was first used in 1897 by Flora Shaw.

¹³¹ Ojo, G.J.A., Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis, London: University of London Press Ltd., 1966, p.19.

¹³² Gbadegesin, O., "Destiny, Personality and the ultimate Reality of Human Existence: A Yoruba Perspective". Paper presented at the second biennial meeting of the Institute for Ultimate Reality and Meaning in Toronto, Canada., August 1983.

¹³³ Source: National Population Commission as shown in the appendix from NNPC 1995 Diary, p.9., Lagos.

Nigerian Yorubas, for the ancestral home of the Yoruba is in Nigeria, and there, the culture thrives best.

Geographically, the Yoruba ethnic group are found in the South-Western part of Nigeria. "They are one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and Africa's most studied races, especially with regard to their history, religion, art and culture"¹³⁴.

They cover five states in Nigeria namely: Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Lagos and Ogun. They cover a substantial part of Kwara and Kogi states respectively as well. As a group the Yoruba has the following sub groups: Oyo, Ife, Ijesha, Ekiti, Ilaje, Igbomina, Egun, Awori, Ikale, Owo, Akoko, Ijebu, Owe, Kabba, Remo, Ondo, Ajase and Popo¹³⁵. The last two are now in Benin Republic. All these sub-groups speak a common language known as Yoruba. This language has other local dialects, many of which are mutually unintelligible. The Yoruba comprise several clans which are bound by language, traditions and Religious beliefs and practices¹³⁶.

2.2.2 Their Origin

The origin of the Yoruba is still a fertile ground for research but from the archaeological evidence available, a number of writers are using the similarities between arts and culture of the Yoruba and those of Egyptians to refer to possible migrations from the East of Africa, around the upper Egypt, from where they came and were subjects to the Egyptian conqueror, Nimrud (Lamurudu for the Yoruba)¹³⁷. William Bascom alleged that they were driven out from Arabia, where they settled for a while, because of religious differences, by Yaa-roo-ba, son of Kahtan¹³⁸. Arabia was a Moslem nation while the Yorubas practised paganism. Lamurudu was said to have been slain in the fight that ensued before their

¹³⁴ Johnson, S., The History of the Yorubas, CMS Lagos, 1921, pp.6-7.

¹³⁵ Alaketu and Orisabe are said to be grandchildren of Oduduwa, until today these people have common links with their Yoruba brothers.

¹³⁶ Idowu, B., Olodumare, God in the Yoruba belief, London: Longman, Green and Co. Ltd., 1962, p.17.

¹³⁷ Gbadegesin, O., Op. Cit.

¹³⁸ Bascom, W., The Yoruba of Southern Nigeria, New York: Praeger Pub., 1970, p.xiv.



departure. He was superseded by *Oduduwa*, one of his sons, who escaped to Ile-Ife and later became king. "He is the legendary progenitor of the Yoruba groups and his grand-children became the kings of the several Yoruba empires"¹³⁹. According to the account by Smith, "Egypt was a temporary home of the Yoruba, until another disagreement put them on the migration march. They finally settled in West Coast of Africa"¹⁴⁰.

The human race no doubt, must originate at a particular time and place, through a particular historical way. Oral tradition therefore regarded *Ile-Ife* as the home of human race. *Oduduwa* alongside some *Orisa* (deities) was sent by *Olodumare* (Almighty God) from *Isanlu Orum* (heaven) to establish *aye* (the earth) with *Ogun* (the god of iron) leading and clearing the way and *Obatala* (the deity of creation) and *Oduduwa* in the entourage.

There is no doubt that in this first settlement, now revered as the cradle of the people, the Yoruba must have attained a high level of material culture¹⁴¹. Ife oral traditions till today still sings: "*Ife ooye, nibi oju ti nmo wa, Ife ooye olori aye gbogbo*"¹⁴².

In our bid to find out more about the origin of the Yoruba people from the custodian of their customs, we interviewed Pa Ijaodola, the "Logun Emese", a court messenger at the Ooni's palace, Ile-Ife, on their origin. From the narrative account given us, the origin of the Yoruba is wrapped up in myths and stories. His story corroborates some of the earlier documented ones. Practically, every African society has its own myths concerning the origin of man. The account of creation, for the Yoruba people more specifically, is wrapped up in myths.

For the Yoruba, '*Olodumare*', Almighty God, has been asserted to be the origin and ground of everything that is. The Yorubas have never really thought further back than '*Olodumare*', the Supreme Deity. However, whenever the question about the origin of

¹³⁹ Gbadegesin, O., Op. Cit. p.173.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, R.S., Olodumare God in Yoruba Belief, London: Longman, 1962, p.3.

¹⁴¹ Ajayi, J.F.A., (ed) A Thousand Years of West Africa History, Ibadan: University Press, 1977, p.193.

¹⁴² Oral Traditions: narrations collected from Ile-Ife, during the field-work, October 1994. Translation: 'Ife mother-earth, where the day-dawn comes from, Ife mother-earth, the head of the whole world'.

'*Olodumare*' arises, "it has been nipped in the bud as the dangerous beginning of irreverent inquisitiveness"¹⁴³.

According to the Yoruba Cosmogony, the earth was once a large mass of water. Up in the sky or heaven, lived *Olodumare*, the Supreme deity, hence His other name *Olorun* (the owner of the sky or heaven). There, also lived with Him the divinities and some other beings.

There are two distinguishing accounts regarding the creation of the universe in Yoruba mythology of creation. The first account was narrated to us by an informant at Ile-Ife while the second account was made accessible through earlier researches conducted and documented on Yoruba history. The two accounts are narrated as follows.

2.2.2.1 *The Two Narrative Accounts of Creation*

2.2.2.1.1 - ORISANLA

Olodumare (Almighty God) decided to create the solid earth; although no one knows what motivated Him to conceive of the idea. The idea was conceived in Him, and at once it was put into action. Instead of doing it by Himself, since He is too mighty for that type of task, *Olodumare* charged His deputy, *Orisanla* (the arch-divinity), with the duty. In order to carry out this task, *Orisanla* was given some quantity of loose earth in a snail's shell, accompanied by a five-toed hen and a pigeon.

From the sky, the heavenly bodies (the supreme deity and the divinities) used to descend upon the watery waste by strands of spider's web which also formed the bridges in-between the world. Some of them were even reported to be coming down frequently for hunting purposes¹⁴⁴.

When *Orisanla* came down from the sky, he poured the loose earth on a spot on the watery waste, let go the hen and the pigeon to scatter and spread the loose earth, until a very large portion of water was covered. This became a huge landmass constituting the solid earth.

On the completion of this first phase of creation, *Orisanla* went back and reported to the supreme deity, who then dispatched the Chameleon to go and inspect the work. From the first visit, the Chameleon reported that, although wide enough, the earth was not yet sufficiently dry for any further operation. After the second visit, however, it confirmed that the earth was then dry enough for occupation. Then followed another task given to *Orisanla*,

¹⁴³ Idowu, B., Op. Cit. p.18.

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem. p.19.

to equip and embellish the earth. This time, he was accompanied by *Orunmila*, the wise counsellor. They were given instructions to plant the primeval '*Igi Ope*' (Palm Tree), handed on to *Orisanla* by *Olodumare*, for the purpose of its juice to provide drink, its seed to provide oil, its kernel to provide food and its leaves to provide shelter. Furthermore, the pigeon and the hen were to be left on earth to multiply and provide meat, all for the dwellers of the earth. Three other trees that are full of juice were also given to be planted by *Orisanla*, to supply drinks too, since there was no rain yet.

The spot on which the loose earth was originally poured was named Ile-Ife, (meaning a wide area of land), now regarded as the holy city of the Yoruba people and the cradle of humanity¹⁴⁵.

2.2.2.1.2 - ODUDUWA.

This account is a variant of the first account. Here we are presented with another agent, through whom the creation exercise was really accomplished, namely, *Oduduwa*. This second account narrates that, *Orisanla*, on his way to carry out the instruction received from *Olodumare*, got drunk from a tempting supply of palm-wine, and fell into a deep sleep. After a long expectation of his return, *Olodumare* sent another divinity - *Oduduwa*, to go and find out what happened. When he came there, seeing him lying helpless, *Oduduwa*, instead of waking him up, simply collected the materials and tools *Orisanla* was going to use and went to perform the task. *Oduduwa* was commended for this job and was then recognised as the divinity who accomplished the work of creation of the universe¹⁴⁶.

The above accounts summarise the mythology of creation according to Yoruba belief. The belief of the Yoruba in the stories and myths of creation is never in doubt. In short, stories and myths are tools and accessories of traditional communication for the Yoruba¹⁴⁷. By traditional media here are meant those forms of communication in Yorubaland which are indigenous to the people and their cultures. This fact is borne out of the response received

¹⁴⁵ This story, read in Yoruba Literature, was again confirmed by informants as Oral Tradition narrations: collected from Ife during the field work in October 1994.

¹⁴⁶ Talbot, P.A., The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, Vol.3, London: Oxford Press, 1926, p.260.

¹⁴⁷ This was a summarized expression from Chief Babatunde Oyafemi, an informant and an historian from a tape-recorded interview during the field work.

from our informant who told us the first story above. When asked the source of his story. His answer was simply "Asembaye ni" - "It has been there before we were born and told by our fore-fathers and we believed them as custodians of our tradition that they never lied"¹⁴⁸.

Neville Jayaweera's definition of traditional media (like stories and myths) could be seen as a strong support in this sphere. He defines this as "communication modes that have their origin in predominantly agricultural or rural societies, relatively independent of modern technologies, and adopt local cultural forms"¹⁴⁹.

The authenticity of stories and myths within traditional Yoruba society depended much on their societal structures. For example, not everyone was allowed to divulge important information such as the mythology above. In many Yoruba communities and other African communities, the hierarchical structure of society descending from the ruler to the town crier or the person of a female chief in the council of chiefs, representing the interests of the womenfolk, served as channels for the diffusion of information and control of society¹⁵⁰. The message descended through different levels of authority, through the town crier, an expert of such communication, who announces it to the public. Hence, the Yoruba say "*Enu agba ni Obi ti ngbo*", - only the elders have the legal or authentic rights to tell stories.

We had wanted to interview the "*Ooni of Ife*"- the king, but we were directed to his representative who deals with such matters concerning the information we needed. Our informant told us that he has been in the Obas court for well over forty years and has given such information to a handful of researchers like us. According to him: "only a handful of us are commissioned to do this"¹⁵¹. The reason for limitation on those allowed to divulge such information may be for co-ordination and uniformity in the information they give.

¹⁴⁸ Pa Ijaodola, Op. cit.

¹⁴⁹ Jayaweera, N., Folk Media and Development Communication: Myths and Realities, Manila, Asian Social Institute, Delhi: ISPCK, 1991, p.17.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Badejo, E.A., Consolidating the Gains of Traditional Media For Evangelization in the African Church, Unpublished Dissertation for Licentiate in Social Communication, Universita Pontificia Salesiana, Roma, 1995, p.31.

¹⁵¹ Pa Ijaodola, an informant, Op. cit.

Traditional Yoruba society fell within the group of early African societies whose mode of communication was by oral tradition. Literary tradition was never in evidence as a source of information in traditional Yoruba society. Ugboaja's terminology of traditional communication as the expression of "*Oramedia*", a term which he coined himself in order to highlight their dimension of orality is well aligned with the Yoruba situation here. He explained:

"Oramedia or folk media are grounded on indigenous culture (sic) produced and consumed by members of a group. They reinforce the values of the group. They are visible cultural features, often strictly conventional, by which social relationships and a world view are maintained and defined. They take on many forms and are rich in symbolism"¹⁵².

Yoruba traditional media are, therefore, those forms of communication which survive in storytelling, drama or theatre, dance, proverbs, the use of musical instruments, myths, symbols and even, in some special contexts, names. George Ehusani, on his part, would go along with this idea. He also adopted the term "orature", already used by East African literary critics, to identify "the total body of oral discourse, styles and traditions of African people, including their visual art" as what needs to be studied, these being "the indispensable theoretical foundation for historical, philosophical or literary work in Africa"¹⁵³. Any genuine effort to interact with culture in Yorubaland will have to take these media into account because, as Eilers has said, "The rediscovery of traditional means of communication is definitely a re-discovery of that oral culture which is so important for any communication exchange between cultures"¹⁵⁴. So for us to understand traditional Yoruba society, their traditional modes mentioned above in communicating their values and customs must be appreciated.

¹⁵² Ugboajah, F., "Oramedia in Africa" in F., Ugboajah (ed.), Mass Communication, Culture and Society in West Africa, London: Hans Zell, 1988, p.166.

¹⁵³ Ehusani, G.O., An Afro-Christian Vision "Ozovehe": Toward a More Humanized World, New York: University Press of America, 1991, p.121.

¹⁵⁴ Eilers, F., Communicating between Cultures, Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992, p.86.

Accordingly, from Yoruba cosmogony, we deduce that the earth and all inhabitants including human beings were created by a supreme being called *Olodumare*, who again made it possible for them to live on the earth. One basic denominator common to all Yoruba belief is 'God'. For them, He is the creator and ultimate force behind all beings. The Yoruba believe the one supreme Being called *Olodumare*, to be the first cause of all things and all are subject to His commands. Hence, He is called '*Elemi*' (the owner of the spirit of life); and '*Alewilese*' (He whose word is action). From the mythology of the origin of man in Yoruba cosmogony, a human being is more than just body. He has, a spiritual element which is the breath of God. Without any Christian theological influence on Yoruba thought, the Yoruba sees body and soul as closely interwoven and often speaks of them as if they were one. *Olodumare* is regarded as the absolute ruler of the universe, the most powerful in heaven and on earth. With His absolute authority, He can do all things and this explains why He is called *Olodumare*, meaning the 'Almighty'.

There is the general belief among the Yoruba even today, in spite of relatively modern tastes which pervade Yoruba cities, that the expansion to other parts occupied by the Yoruba today is traced to a dispersal from Ile-Ife. The place from which the princes dispersed is still remembered as *Itajero*, (the place of conference), and is situated just outside the *Ooni's* palace (the king of Ile-Ife)¹⁵⁵.

Every Yoruba sub groups traces their origin to Ile-Ife and regard Ife as the cradle of the Yoruba and of the universe¹⁵⁶. Ife dynasty has concrete links with the Alaafin (Oyo king) through *Oranmiyan* as well as with the Oba of Benin. Dauite Pacheco Pereira, a Portuguese visitor to Benin recorded that the Oba of Benin acknowledged the Ooni as superior and that he "is considered among the Negroes as the Pope among us"¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵⁵ Crowder, M., West Africa: An Introduction to its History, London: Longman, 1977, p.38.

¹⁵⁶ This is the belief of every Yoruba person even with the technological development today. We were taken round a few symbolic places that marked Yoruba origins at Ooni's palace during the survey.

¹⁵⁷ See Crowder, M., Op. cit. p.39.

2.3 The Social-Political Institutions

The factors considered here are the Oba and his court, the councils (*ogboni*), the Baale, Molebi or Ebi (the family) and Egbe (the age-grade system). As already noted, in Yoruba communities, the hierarchical structure of society descends from the ruler - Obas in council, to the council of chiefs, family stead and individuals served as channels for the control of society.

Rarely did the family unit remain separate and sovereign. Yoruba families extended into clans, and groups of clans occupied villages or village groups¹⁵⁸. Village groups evolved new social and religious associations and patterns of authority extending beyond the family structure. Such new authorities evolved from the need for offence and defence, the marketing and exchange of agricultural produce, or the sharing of common sacred shrines. The powers and functions attributed to the state no doubt varied with the size and cultural complexity of the state; the larger states developing the more elaborate structure of administration, rituals and patterns of authority. Large or small, the concept of the state involved the vesting of authority in individuals or groups outside the family unit, set apart for purposes of administering in the common interest of the community. It is to this effect that we consider Yoruba Obaship in a descending order and the powers that go with such position.

2.3.1 Yoruba Obaship

In this section, we examine the constitutive elements of the Yoruba Obaship and the various aspects of its rulership in pre-colonial Yoruba society.

In all communities with a long history of Obaship, traditional rulers are still regarded as God's representatives on earth¹⁵⁹. There is a lot of mythology surrounding their origin. Hence they have that sacred aura that even the massive inroads of Western culture has not totally destroyed¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁸ Ajayi, J.F.A., Op. cit. p.12.

¹⁵⁹ Among the Yoruba society an Oba is referred to as "Alase Ekeji Orisa" - 'God's representative on earth or the second in command to the deity'.

¹⁶⁰ The Editorial Column, The Daily Times, Lagos, October 12th, 1982, p.3.

Sacred kingship, as P. C. Lloyd rightly observes, is, among the Yoruba, an ancient institution¹⁶¹. Truly, Yoruba kingship is an institution of state centred upon the person of the Oba regarded as divine. This phenomenon is accepted on grounds of the king's nature.

By the rite, he is consecrated a ruler and put into immediate contact with his ancestors. Through this act, all the sacral powers of the ancestors including those of the progenitor, Oduduwa are transferred to him. The Oba's consecration confers on him the wisdom to rule his kingdom well¹⁶².

By his consecration and coronation he automatically assumes the position of political, religious and social leader of his town and other villages under his authority. As a religious leader, he leads the yearly ancestral worship of the observance of the celebration of the town's deity like *Okebadan* or *Osun*: a role that has been weakened through Christianisation, Islamism, Westernization and urbanisation today.

Seeking what made Yoruba Obaship a sacred institution, we proffer diverse reasons. As an insider of this ethnic group who has lived most of my life among the Yoruba, one takes account of the special nexus existing between the king and deity. As in the ancient Orient, the Oba is the representative of the deity in his State. Some scholars have lent their support to this view. Robert Farris Thompson writes: "the rulers of these ancient provinces all claim descent from Oduduwa. They are honoured as seconds of the gods (*ekeji orisa*)"¹⁶³. In this same light, E. Dada Adelowo's recent remark on the sanctity of the Obaship is quite apposite:

"In the cultic activities of a town, the Oba is usually the head of the ritual leaders. He is the priest-king. In Ile-Ife, for example, the Ooni of Ife, *Alase Ekeji Orisa* is usually the *Pontifex Maximus*. He is the *Olori Awon Aworo* - the head of all the priests. He assumes this office in consequence of his sceptre *are* which is derived from the divinity to whom he is viceregent"¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶¹ Llyod, "Sacred Kingship", p.222.

¹⁶² Ibid., pp.227-228; also, Parrinder, "Divine Kinship", pp.115-116.

¹⁶³ R.F., Thompson, "The Sign of the Divine King", p.8. quoted from U.Ch. Manus, "*Jesu Kristi Oba: A Christology of 'Christ the King' Among the Indigenous Christian Churches In Yorubaland, Nigeria.*", in Journal of Asian Theology, AJT/5:2/91, pp.314-315.

¹⁶⁴ E.D., Adelowo, "Rituals, Symbolism and Symbols in Yoruba Traditional Religious Thought", in Asian Journal of Theology 4 (1990) pp.162ff.

The sacred character of a Yoruba Oba is, besides, attested to in a number of extant oral traditions and in euphemistic speech forms uttered by the people¹⁶⁵. Whenever he appears in public, he is hardly recognized as a person. He is clothed in voluminous spreading gowns and wears a conical beaded crown (*ade*), as Asiwaju rightly states, "the significant element in the whole regalia"¹⁶⁶.

Even though the Oba officiates at state rituals, the Oba is not a professional priest. He is only the cultic head of the State. This feature is confirmed by Asiwaju who says "...the Oba normally assumes his role as the community's high-priest" during public religious ceremonies and festivals¹⁶⁷.

The Yoruba king, though a sacred ruler, is democratically elected to rule his people. This dual role is what makes him a man of the people and the intermediary between the people and the unseen world, that is, those of the *Aye* (this world) and those of the *Orun* (the spirit-world)¹⁶⁸.

The Oba unites the community in the worship he leads and, through its rituals, he re-enacts the cosmic harmony that should exist between heaven and earth, thus gaining blessings from the gods and the ancestral spirits which materialize in the flow of abundant riches and spiritual well being of the State and its people. In this light it becomes reasonable to accept that the Oba, like other sacred kings in the history of kingship is the middleman in "the cultic relationships between the society and the supernatural sphere"¹⁶⁹.

The traditional Yoruba community believed that a kingdom without an Oba would not exist. For the ancient Yoruba, kingship was therefore a mechanism for co-ordinating the various structures of the society, for maintaining peace and enforcing co-operation among the

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Manus, U. Ch., "*Jesu Kristi Oba: A Christology of 'Christ the King' among the Indigenous Christian Churches in Yorubaland, Nigeria*" in Asian Journal of Theology, Vol.5, No.2, 1991, p.313-314.

¹⁶⁶ Asiwaju, "Political Motivation", p.113. as quoted from U.Ch. Manus Op. cit. p.314.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p.113.

¹⁶⁸ For comparative ideas, see "Kingship" in M. Eliade et al. (eds.), The Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol.8, Macmillan, New York, London, 1987, p.314.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p.314.

people as well as the means to ward off evil, confusion, disorder and anarchy in the state. The Oba was believed to take care of his kingdom and to exercise restraint to the inhabitants. The fortunes of the towns within the kingdom are improved under a good Oba or are perverted by a bad one¹⁷⁰.

The Oba heads a sovereign government as his policies are meant to concern themselves with the well-being of his subjects.

The Oba presided over the state council made up of people from the royal lineage and those given an honorary title¹⁷¹. Such lineages include the kingmakers (*Afobaje*) and other traditional title holders with political, social and religious functions. The socio-political system was such as to encourage the monarch to rule in the interest of the people as monitored through the Chiefs. The Chiefs were many and representing various interests; it was the balance of the interests that dictated what type of governmental policy or measure was acceptable in the long run.

The females are represented by *Iyalode*¹⁷² - a matured woman past child rearing age and wealthy as she has to avoid rigorous jobs and trading.

The Ogboni (the high priest) comprises of the Chief Ifa priest, the Aworo, Balogun¹⁷³, the commander, the Basorun - head of cults (religious affairs), Iya agan and Iyalode. They fix the dates of religious festivals, arrange for sacrifices to appease the gods, organise and authorise the initiation of adults into guilds and cults inclusive of egungun cult (masquerade cult); the councils maintain order by means of enforcing sanctions. *Oro* is cult which has *Iya* again as the only female member. It must not be witnessed by women hence the saying:

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Manus, U.C., "*Jesu Kristi Oba: A Christology of Christ the King among the Indigenous Christian Churches in Yorubaland, Nigeria*", in Journal of Asian Theology, AJT/5:2/91, p.315.

¹⁷¹ Ojo, G.J.A., Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis, London: University of London Press Ltd., 1966, p.126.

¹⁷² This indigenous title has been taken over in the religious cycles today among the Yoruba Christian Churches as an inculturated Christian title depicting the religious equivalent of the political structure among women folk. This will be taken up in the later chapters.

¹⁷³ We have such titles as Balogun in nearly all the Christian Churches in Yorubaland today. A transfer or taking over of indigenous title in the religious cycle.

*"Awo Egungun lobinrin le se
Awo gelede lobinrin le mo
Bo 'binrin foju k'oro, oro a gbe"*

"A woman can participate in Egungun festivities
A woman can know the details of gelede
But it is forbidden for a woman to meet Oro, she will die".

At the advent of Christianity and colonial administration these components of the political and religious system of the Yoruba suffered greatly as they were branded a secret cult and their functions transferred to the native authority.

Political views expressed in lineage meetings are laid before the Oba's palace council by the Chiefs¹⁷⁴. When the situation demands it, the Oba makes pronouncements *ex-cathedra*. As Asiwaju puts it:

"In every kingdom, the king or Oba (distinguished by his use of the beaded crown) advised by a council of titled men representing diverse interests, ruled supreme"¹⁷⁵.

Symbolically, he is the centre of the society. He mediates between the many sectional interest-groups that compose the social structure of the State he rules. Thus, there is truth in the judgement of M. Eliade and his colleagues that such functional kings hold "the social cosmos together"¹⁷⁶. The idea found in most kingship traditions; namely that the king is "a cosmic giver of life"¹⁷⁷ readily finds its expression in the Yoruba Obaship traditions.

The king is often spoken of as *Oba Aye* - king terrestrial and *Oba Orun* - king celestial - Supernatural Highness. All these attributes express the fact that the king's supremacy extends to virtually every facet of existence known and unknowable. He is *Kabiyesi* - the king who rules for as long as he lives¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁴ Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship", Op cit. p.230.

¹⁷⁵ Asiwaju, "Political Motivation", Op.cit. p.117.

¹⁷⁶ "Kingship" in Eliade et al., Op. cit., p.313.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Oral communication used to address the Yoruba Oba's. This is usually used by the court messengers. Retold during the field work by Pa Ijaodola, (aged 60yrs). *Logun*

His royalty carried with it certain charismatic qualities of leadership that entitle him to enforce obedience on all who inhabit his state¹⁷⁹.

A remarkable common feature of the monarchical system as practised by the Yoruba in the pre-colonial era afforded the entire citizenry active participation in politics through their lineages, age-sets and titled societies. They indirectly influenced policies and directly helped in implementing such policies. What is more, their views and feelings directly and indirectly mattered very much in the processes by which the acknowledged rulers - monarchs or elders - were designated, maintained or removed if necessary¹⁸⁰.

This system adopted by the traditional society prevented institutionalized absolutism by the accredited rulers; it also made it very difficult, if not impossible, for a parvenu to acquire power, much less absolute power, outside the established institutions of the government. This difficulty springs from the fact that all the ingredients of power - military, economic and religious - were difficult to manoeuvre by an individual outside the institutionalized channels. There was usually no standing army in any of the polities or communities. Society depended largely on ad-hoc arrangements in times of crisis or war.

The magico-religious potency which arouses special and popular loyalty to a Yoruba Oba is deeply-rooted in the traditions. All these as well as the myths, legends and royal theology still survive in the court history. As a people very rich in literary and artistic culture, the Yoruba have preserved much of these traditions intact. Conversion to Christianity and even to Islam has not made the people break with much of their past values. Contemporary Yoruba Christians thus draw immense inspiration from the wealthy corpus of their traditions. One such theme is this charismatic aspect of the Oba's rulership in its most positive characteristics. This has ideally inspired Yoruba indigenous Christian establishments to conceive Jesus Christ as *Jesu Kristi Oba* in their churches and interpersonal relationships¹⁸¹.

Emese, court messenger at the Ooni's Palace, Ile-Ife, April 10th, 1995.

¹⁷⁹ Here, see B. Schnepel, "Max Weber's Theory of Charisma and its Applicability to Anthropological Research", in Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford 17 (1987) 26-48, esp. pp.22-45.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Manus, U.Ch., Op. cit. p.319.

¹⁸¹ Chris Manus has developed a whole idea of seeing Christ as the African king thereby establishing a strong link between Christ as a King which has inspired the Yoruba

2.3.2 The Baale (Village Head)

The next in line in the hierarchical structure of leadership/rulership in traditional Yoruba society was the *Baale* or the village head.

The *Baale* heads a village that is tributary to a town and pays *Isakole* (tribute) to the king. He is usually without a crown. His wives are called *Iya* to differentiate them from *Oloris* (a nickname given to Oba's wives). The courts are usually not elaborate and wives of Baales are not inherited by another Baale.

This group of people alongside some traditional rulers in small towns became second-class rulers under the colonial administrative until recently¹⁸².

2.4 The Family

The most important of these institutions and the most basic is the family.

The initial problem is to define the term 'family' which because of its socio-cultural relativity has no single meaning. The family is both a biological and socio-cultural unit. As a socio-group, the family is characterized by common residence, economic co-operation-cum-maintenance, reproduction, and it is a unit for primary socialization.

Murdock¹⁸³, describes family as a unit involving adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children of the sexually co-habiting adults. But when it is viewed in a wider African perspective, 'family' refers to all relatives living together who are related by blood, marriage or adoption.

For the Yoruba, the family includes parents, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters, who may have their own children or other immediate relatives, in what is

indigenous Churches to conceive Jesus Christ as *Jesu Kristi Oba* in their Churches and even in inter-personal relationships. Cf. Manus, U.C., Christ, the African King, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang Press, 1993. 280 pages.

¹⁸² We noted during our visits that no village in Yorubaland today wanted to be a tributary to any town Oba. They all value their independence and as such do everything possible to appoint educated elites as Oba who would in turn fight their cause in the community of city and town Obas.

¹⁸³ Murdock, G.P., Social Structure, New York: The Free Press, 1965, p.2.

now known as the 'extended family'¹⁸⁴. In this sense, the family is characterised by a sense of family identification and loyalty, social placement and control, mutual assistance among members and a concern for the perpetuation of the family unit¹⁸⁵.

2.4.1 The Nuclear Family

The nuclear or compound family is made up of a man and his wife or wives and their children, who may occupy a house or be located in rooms in the house of the man's father or senior brother¹⁸⁶. Anthropologists have claimed that there are three types of residential patterns¹⁸⁷. First, the virilocal or patrilocal. This means that wife lives with the husband and his people. Second, Neolocal. Here, the couple establish themselves away from relatives in a new locality. Third, Uxorilocal or Matrilocal. By this the husband joins the wife with her mother and other relatives.

¹⁸⁴ Mbiti, J.S., African Religion and Philosophy, London: Heinemann Pub., 1981 ed., p.106. According to his definition of extended family, it meant that two or more brothers (in Patrilocal Societies) or sisters (in Matrilocal Societies) establish families in one compound or close to one another. The joint household together are like one large family. In either case, the number of family members may rise from ten persons to even a hundred where several wives belonging to one husband may be involved.

¹⁸⁵ The Oyafemi family tree of Okunoye compound in appendix 1 places into fuller perspective the definitions and workings of a typical Yoruba family even today.

¹⁸⁶ Bradbury in his book "The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking People of South-Western Nigeria" recognizes this arrangement as a nuclear family grouping. Cf. Bradbury, R.E., The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking People of South-Western Nigeria, London: International Institute, 1975, p.28.

¹⁸⁷ Obbo, C., African Women, Hutchinson: Zed Press, 1982, p.34; Goode, W.J., The Family, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964, p.34.

The first pattern was the ancient practice all over the Yorubaland¹⁸⁸. However, civilization, educational development, and urbanisation are contributory factors to preference given to the second pattern, not only by the Yoruba but all over the country¹⁸⁹. Since patriarchy is the Yoruba custom, Uxorilocal marriages are not common, though they are prevalent among the Ekiti and Ilorin people.

Elementary family then is made up of a man, his wife and child or children. Eric Ayisi used this concept in a special way to distinguish it from the universalistic view which treats the nuclear family as building-blocks of social structure. He contends that the most important aspect of the family is that it is founded upon the institution of marriage, and therefore it unites two kin groups in reciprocal obligations and mutual interests¹⁹⁰. However, the conjugal family has some autonomy among the Yoruba society but is "commonly enmeshed in an extended kinship system"¹⁹¹. Furthermore, kinsmen often exercise great control over the conjugal pair, and frequently dictate the choice of mate.

Nearly every Yoruba family has five integral components. Such components as: the parents, the children, the in-laws: this could be in two forms; (i) Parent-in-laws from the father side and (ii) those from the mother side; other parents including uncles and aunts of the

¹⁸⁸ There is still clear evidence of this pattern even today among the Yoruba families. Most Yoruba families believe that the patrilocal residence is the ideal pattern. Hence, this is manifested in their manner of speech. They say "*Ile ni abo isinmi oko*" - 'the patrilocal family is home while other patterns of living except this remain foreign'.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Abe, G.O., "The Jewish and Yoruba Social Institution of Marriage: A Comparative Study" in Orita, Journal of Religious Studies, Vol.XXI, Ibadan, June 1989, p.13.

¹⁹⁰ Ayisi, E.O., An Introduction to the Study of African Culture, (2nd. ed.), London: James Currey Ltd., 1988, p.15.

¹⁹¹ We observed here that there is no clear-cut distinction between a closed nuclear family among the Yoruba society as it is well pronounced in the Western nuclear patterns. For example, most of the nuclear families we visited even in the cities have one or more relatives living with their closed family in their rented quarters.

extended family. In the strict Yoruba parlance, there is no word like uncles and aunts. All here assume the role and duties, and exercise the authority of fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters on the children. The content and practice of childrearing, the most clearcut exercise in teaching the child the ways, rules, attitudes and expectations of the group, are infused with sentiments of loyalty to the group. As the Yoruba say, "*Atibi'mo, tiya re, atitomo, t'ebi re*" (it is the mother's lot to give birth to the child, it is the duty of the kin to raise the child).

The process through which the members socialise and are indoctrinated in Yorubaland is called "traditional education". This system has a rich educational content which aims at achieving traditional Yoruba educational goals. The content according to Pa Ajayi¹⁹² embraced the following characteristics:

"participatory education, learning skills, recreational opportunities, intellectual training, moral education, socialization, cultural training, all of which aim at multilateral objectives to produce an individual who is honest, respectful and respectable, skilled, co-operative and conforms to social order i.e. to develop the latent physical skill, character, respect for elders and those in authority, train in specific vocational skill and healthy attitude towards honest labour and human dignity, to infuse a sense of belonging and desire to participate in community development towards the promotion and recognition for our cultural heritage"¹⁹³.

The methodology of the Yoruba traditional education was not very elaborate. "It comprises learning by doing and observing"¹⁹⁴. It was informal as teaching and learning took place anywhere and at any time. It is pertinent to say here that such teaching methodology took no respect for the intellectual capacity of the child in the learning and teaching processes. "The child was told to do what the elders asked him without question"¹⁹⁵. This is a great limitation to learning unlike in the formal system. In the traditional education, religion and

¹⁹² An informant and an educationalist who still believes strongly in traditional Yoruba education as the best way of indoctrinating the young ones into the larger society.

¹⁹³ Ibid. Pa. Ajayi's interview on traditional education Dec. 1994 at Ile-Ife.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

taboos controlled behaviour because every Yoruba household and community had a religious spot for worship¹⁹⁶.

Traditional education starts from birth. Culture passes from generation to generation. Child rearing practice also begins from birth to adulthood as already mentioned above. The traditional education is integrated and not departmentalised.

These components play very significant roles in the well-being of the family in the traditional Yoruba society and they wield a considerable influence on the individual.

We were told by informants that there were three marked stages in the process of integration of a Yoruba child. These stages are distinguished by: (i) Infancy, (ii) Childhood and (iii) Adulthood.

At birth, the baby is received warmly by the entire family. A naming ceremony is organized in which the child is incorporated into the family. He enjoys the influence of the extended family as grandparents come round to help nurse the infant.

At childhood, they receive training in toileting, eating, socialization and good behaviour from parents, siblings, relatives and friends. They watch mother closely, learn by imitation, learn first language - mother-tongue, learn the meaning of smiles, cries, and frowns. Furthermore, they learn to manipulate things. Taboos are used to restrain them from doing certain things. They are sent on small errands, they listen to folk-tales, all of which help in developing the child mentally.

Obedience and respect to elders are emphasized. In respect for elders, greetings and salutation play a major role. Verbal greeting is often followed by physical gesture. The Yoruba child is to prostrate to an elderly person in the society. They are not to look straight into the eyes of their elders or answer back when scolded or called names¹⁹⁷.

Age-grade system found expression in political and community development. This aspect will be treated later. Seniority confers social and economic privileges especially in sharing of spoils, prices, wealth; etc.

We now examine the various components that make up the unit:

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ This custom or practice is still prominent in most of the Yoruba families today although it is more common among those living in the rural areas.

(i) **Father:** This is the head of the institution. He may be a grandfather or the head of the compound (*Baale*) comprising of the kith and kin who have a common ancestry, at the most basic unit. He heads the unit comprising his wife/wives, children and dependants.

(ii) **Mother:** Like the father, in some instances the most senior wife and custodian of the children under the father and of the extended family system. She is often times addressed as *Iya* (mother) or, if a grandmother, *Iya-agba*. She is referred to as *Iyaale*, the political head of the women in the extended compound. She co-ordinates all social activities. Because of the importance of seniority in ordering relationships within the compound, male and female elders have authority over junior members of both sexes. The relationship between males and females of approximately the same age is not usually one of superordination/subordination, but rather one of complementarity of functions, one of purview¹⁹⁸.

(iii) **Children:** These are in three categories - those who are direct offspring of a man and his wife, (by birth), those inherited, and those adopted. The extended family system also had a pupillage arrangement whereby children are moved into certain families for grooming.

¹⁹⁸ The question of relative rank of males and females within the lineage and compound is a complex one which cannot be adequately handled in a few sentences. It can be noted that Fortes observed "a high degree of equality between male and female members of the lineage" among the matrilineal Asante of Ghana (Fortes 1950:256-57). Among the patrilineal Yoruba, a person's sex and relative seniority are among the factors which determine relative rank in any given situation (Marshall 1970). Nevertheless, the ideology of the Yoruba holds that in general, males out-rank females, and in general females do show deference toward males of their own age and older by kneeling or curtsying in their presence. It is misleading, however, to attempt to assess the overall status of females in any West African society on the basis of the different behaviour they display toward males. Thus Rosaldo is mistaken in implying that Yoruba females have low status because they traditionally kneel before their husbands (Rosaldo 1974:20). Her reference to the "bowing and scraping of the Yoruba wife" (1974:22) is a particularly misleading statement. Just as females kneel before their husbands, so do males prostrate themselves before their mothers, older sisters, and other female whose age or position demand that they do so.

(iv) **In-laws:** These are two sets - the first being that of the wife, namely her parents, the siblings and relations. The second set is that of the husband, namely the parents, the siblings and relations. The wife is expected to be very close to her in-laws so that her children can perfectly fit into the unit.

The husband is expected to be close to his in-laws and give them their due respect at family gathering and occasions - as people often say "*Ko si kekere ana*", that is all in-laws are important regardless of age or status. Referring to the wife, people set a minor rule of great significance - "*Aya buruku se fe, ana buruku ko see ni*", you can marry a bad girl as a wife but bad in-laws are forbidden. This justifies the painstaking enquiries involved in the traditional marriage of the Yoruba. Enquiries into records of the in-laws on account of health, social and economic status often prevent marrying from families that are antisocial.

Depending on the cohesion within the family, the relations, married women who return for the occasion, representatives of both maternal and paternal sides may try to outsmart one another in the show of affection especially during marriages, chieftaincy titles and burials¹⁹⁹.

2.4.2 The Extended Family.

I would like to situate the discussion of the Yoruba extended family system by discussing two case studies that emerged during my investigation in the field. We tried to find out whether this system was still in vogue among modern Yoruba families.

The first case study is that of two urban families, although one of the families has its origin in the rural village but has migrated to the urban centre lived there for a long period and have all their offspring in that city but still strictly have some loyalty to their place of origin.

The second case study presents a family, most of whom live and work in the city but have to maintain a bond with their village family system in order to maintain their landed and other immovable property.

2.4.2.1 Case Study One - Aderonke and Adeola

Aderonke's family came from Ikirun, a sub-Yoruba town in the present Osun state but settled in Abeokuta, another Yoruba city in Ogun state. She was born and bred in Abeokuta. She has a boyfriend Adeola who is from Abeokuta. Their friendship developed into an

¹⁹⁹ A display witnessed during the traditional wedding between Yetunde Ademola Ajayi, (aged 26yrs), and Busola Holloway, (aged 30yrs), in Lagos, November 16th, 1994.

intimate relationship and they propose to get married. But the difficulty came up when they could not agree on a venue for their engagement and marriage. Aderonke, with some of her family, preferred the choice of going back to the village for the ceremonies while the fiancé and some of his family, and some of the lady's family preferred that the ceremonies of engagement and marriage took place in Abeokuta, the place of their abode.

The disagreement in arriving at a suitable and convenient venue for both families brought an abrupt end to their marriage proposal²⁰⁰.

2.4.2.2 Case Study Two- The Ogundiran Family

"The Ogundiran family are from Omu-Ekiti, a village in Oye Local Government of Ondo-state. The two brothers who owned some cocoa and other cash-crop plantations died some years back and most of their children live and work in the cities and thus could not look after these landed properties on their own, so they decided to contract them out and the produce from the farms are used for the upkeep of their family compound yearly. The system allows for shrines, dumps and fringes around homesteads on which new quarters can be sited"²⁰¹.

There is no doubt that the importance and relevance of the extended family system among the traditional and the contemporary Yoruba society can not be over-emphasised. The two case studies above are pointers to this fact.

Ordinarily, the most basic unit of social organisation in Yoruba society is the *Idile* - the extended family. This is the family unit or lineage group which consists of a family with a large number of people related by descent in one line from a living or dead common ancestor²⁰². Because of the strong link with the departed ones of the family, the extended

²⁰⁰ This case was brought before me by one of the parties involved for advice and possible settlement during the field work.

²⁰¹ An informant who happens to be a member of the extended family gave this version during an interview with him.

²⁰² From our informants, there is no distinction between the living and their departed ancestors. At all family gatherings, the spirits of the departed family members are evoked before the beginning of whatever celebrations or meetings of the entire family. The belief among the Yoruba homes is that these ancestors still live among them but in spirit.

family wields a considerable influence in major decisions taken or to be taken by any members of the extended family system. This is more so in the sense that no one exists or does anything individually. There is what one might call "group-thinking and group-living". African scholars like Mbiti succinctly acknowledged this fact when he opined:

"only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards other people"²⁰³.

The extended family is resident in *agboile* (compound) made up of the *agnates*²⁰⁴ with their wives, children, children's wives and strangers. According to Niara Surdakasa:

"extended families are essentially constellations of living relatives. Their precise composition will vary depending upon the person who is taken as the "central ego" from whom the extended family is being reckoned"²⁰⁵.

Yoruba extended families are large and very cohesive with duties and responsibilities for every unit and members within the family²⁰⁶. A typical sample structure of this family unit was observed during the field work and a family tree of Okunoye compound is produced in drawings²⁰⁷.

²⁰³ Mbiti, J.S., African Religions and Philosophy, London: Heinemann, 1970.

²⁰⁴ *Agnates* are those persons who are related to one another by links through patrilineal descent.

²⁰⁵ Sudarkasa, N., "Towards a Clarification of African Family Structure and its Relationship to Afro-American Family Structure" in The Black Scholar, America, Nov/Dec 1980 Issue, p.41.

²⁰⁶ This is observed mostly in the villages we visited during the field work. Our informants told us that most of the houses found within a street are owned by sons and daughters of that extended family because the land in which they have their buildings belong jointly to the entire family.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Appendix 1 showing the Oyafemi family, Okunoye compound, Otan Ayegbaju, Osun-State, a typical Yoruba family.

Within the Yoruba extended family system, the rallying "central ego" is the "*Olori ebi*" - the family head.

Authority is vested in the *Olori-ebi* and the office is paternal and personalised. It is related to age, the oldest in the group regarded as close to the ancestors, the wisest and most experienced, trusted and respected by all. The custodian of family history, totems and artefacts in whose *odede* (compound) the people gather for formal weddings, meetings and other celebrations.

The insistence of Aderonke and some of her own family on going back to their home town to formalize their marriage might not have been unconnected to their belief in their loyalty to the authority of the family head and of the entire family, both alive and dead²⁰⁸. However, the position of family head has seriously been altered in most Yoruba families and societies today due to the movement of people and families into cities in search of greener pastures. Nonetheless, the belief in the "*Olori-ebi*" as a rallying figure is still very strong.

The *Olori-ebi* wields and retains the authority as long as he lives and fulfils the obligations expected of his office. His word is law and he has the last word in arbitration, prayer and deliberations because he has *ase* (authority)²⁰⁹. Each constituent unit in the extended family is equal to another and the authority is conscious of this and treats them equally and justly.

The Yoruba family may be described as a cultural institution and basically committed to the survival of the units. Responsibility and accountability are the hallmarks of their extended family mode of life. The community forms and nurtures individuals since individuals are dependent on the corporate community. The knowledge and activities of Yoruba morality stem principally from their concept of extended family. Thus, according to Chief Oyafemi:

²⁰⁸ Aderonke expressed this major factor as a reason for her insistence on going back to her village for the marriage ceremonies. According to her, "all her other sisters have done the same and that hers should not be an exception as she needed the blessing of the *Olori-ebi*".

²⁰⁹ Chief Babatunde Oyafemi, an informant and an historian, interview in Lagos, Nov. 1994.

“the issues of truth, honesty, obedience, justice, kindness, hospitality, respect etc. stand out in the Yoruba’s will and action”²¹⁰. Sometimes these moral values are dictated by the oracles, divinities and ancestors²¹¹. The Yoruba child is then made part of them in such a way that one stands immediately rebuked by society when one deviates from the established/conventional standards. Hence, at the various occasions, the members are summoned to exercise the ties in religious, political and economic spheres.”

Thus in marriage ceremonies or generally in family life, all issues are considered from the perspective of cohesion²¹². The family confers social status on the child until he is able to upgrade this at maturity²¹³. The family sees the success of one of their members as an investment from which the family as a whole will profit. It takes a whole village to train a child to a successful career, as long as they believe the investment will yield dividends for them and future generations.

However, from the field survey, I observed that there has been a considerable change in cohesion of the extended family system among the Yoruba. This according to our informants is due to the fact of urbanisation which has affected the family system.

From the interview conducted in a rural community of Iganna, among the Abiojes’ and Ojedokun compounds respectively, the responses received from each of the informants on the impact of urbanisation on their extended family system vary. The two families summoned members of their families for a joint meeting once a year around their central ego - the family head where all matters concerning their families are tabled and are dealt with amicably while pledging their loyalty to the leader and the place of origin.

According to the two heads of the family compounds, most of the members are unable to come for common family meetings due to exigencies, job, or poor economy, and talk less of fulfilling their obligations.

²¹⁰ Chief Babatunde Oyafemi, an informant and historian, interviewed in Lagos in November 1994.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Cf. Fagun, M.O., Op. cit. p.118.

²¹³ Cf. Anayo, C.N., "African Traditional Education: A Case Study of a Yoruba Child", A Paper presented at a Seminar on Youths and Education, Mimeographed, Regina Mundi Parish, Mushin Lagos, 25/4/95. p.4.

The interview was conducted in September 1994 during the village festival of Eegun (family masquerade) a time which to most families in that village is the appropriate time for family meetings. They expect every family member from home and abroad to attend such meetings. According to the *Olori ebi* (chairman) of the Abioje's family:

"only forty-five members attended. The majority of those who attended the meeting are from the village or round about. Others who could not attend sent words to us of their financial constraints. Most of those who could not attend the meeting live in Lagos metropolis and because of fuel scarcity, and a hike in transport fare they could not attend"²¹⁴.

When asked how long they have been having such meetings, the response was: "about twelve years." What prompted such meetings?:

"Because we discovered that a lot of our family members do not live in the village anymore, they live in big cities like Lagos, Ibadan and Kaduna and the family is extending through births and marriages to the extent that some of their children do not know one another nor their place of origin; as such we decided when our grandfather died in July 1982 that we shall be holding a common family meeting once a year during the festival of our family masquerade (Eegun), so that the family will remain intact and could make joint decisions on matters related to the welfare of the entire family"²¹⁵.

Here we find an expression of collective responsibility within the Yoruba extended family system. Through their meetings, common and joint decisions are made which benefit every member of the extended family unit.

From our observation and interviews on this matter, Yoruba collectivism is coextensive with all the individual members of the community, who must be considered and consulted in any judgement concerning their good. What Elias expressed in terms of Africans generally is very applicable here to the Yoruba that "the individual has certainly well defined rights and duties within the community"²¹⁶.

²¹⁴ A tape-recorded interview with the *Olori-ebi*.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Elias, T.O., The Nature of African Customary Law, Manchester: University Press, 1956, 2nd Ed. 1962, p.83.

It must be borne in mind that individual persons are definitely recognized but are inseparably linked by the concrete solidarity of all in the community. The community accords a great respect to the individuals and this respect in turn is responsible for their ardent obedience and loyalty to it. This militates against exclusive seeking of individual interest. There is great emphasis on communal co-operation and achievement. This is aptly expressed from the next question of interviews with Pa Adeboje, the head of Abioje's family when he was asked if the meetings have been constantly attended since inauguration? His response: "Yes, except in the last two or three years, the attendance has been dwindling as a result of the economic and political problems in the country. A few of our children have lost their jobs, some of them claim that they are not regularly paid at work while some consider the meeting burdensome because of their displeasure with our festival. One wrote us that "he is a born-again Christian and as such he would not like to associate himself with the family festival." He considers the festival not in tune with his born-again tendency"²¹⁷.

Here we perceive how worried the head of the family was by constraints put in the wheels of their family progress by various urbanisation problems on those who are to attend and pledge their unflinching support and loyalty to the family beliefs.

Freedom is one of the important values for the Yoruba people. Her social system respects the legitimate liberty of individuals, families, and subsidiary groups, only intervening with care for justice and devotion to common good.

It is the responsibility of the individual to be a useful member of the community, and because of his/her upbringing he/she rates the interest of the community very high. Where the individual thinks he/she can work out his/her destiny outside the framework of his community, he/she loses the support of the community and therefore he/she is regarded as an outcast. The Yoruba society has a derogatory name for such an uncompromising individual. He/she is called "*Omo-ale*"- a bastard. That was the exact name Pa Adeboje used for the one who opted out of the family system because of his new religious beliefs. We further asked: "What are you doing about the low attendance?":

"Things are not easy for us too at home, in fact we look up to our children abroad for family loyalty through their financial support for the aged and the

²¹⁷ Ibid.

infirm of the family but since they are not finding it easy either, we are only praying for better and for a change of government”²¹⁸.

From his response the betterment of all within the Yoruba extended community remains the duty and responsibility of the head of the family in association with every member of the family. They are aware of their responsibility to the common good and thus pursue this responsibility to the best of their ability.

In the Ojedokun’s family too, the attendance was poor as compared to other years. When asked the reason for the poor attendance, the chairman quickly retorted “*Ode le*”- the country is hard. He was further asked to expatiate on the statement:

“Are you a stranger in this country that you do not know that it is very hard for most families to survive. We can’t even move out - there is no fuel, there is no money. In our family, we have almost five University graduates who have no job and worse still our farm produce are not selling as they should because of the scarcity of money”²¹⁹.

However, from the reasons given by both families for the low turn-outs at meetings, today’s economic and political situation have affected the networks of the family institutions and the extended family is disintegrating considerably.

One major reason accountable for this is the job-mobility rate which has separated families from one another. This is a new phenomenon among the Yoruba extended community.

In the traditional Yoruba agrarian community, the elders absorb the young boys in farms, teach them how to till the land, plant and harvest crops. When these young farmers mature, a good number of yams and land are provided to them to start their own and earn their living²²⁰.

²¹⁸ Interview with Pa Adeboje Abioje, (aged 68yrs), head of the Abioje's family, Iganna, Oyo-State, September 16th 1994.

²¹⁹ Interview with Chief Adeoye Ojedokun, head Ojedokun's family, Iganna, (aged 71yrs), September 5th 1994.

²²⁰ Cf. Ojo, G.J.A., Op. cit., p.162; Forde, C.D., The Yoruba Speaking Peoples of South Western Nigeria, London, 1951, p.16; Eades, J.S., The Yoruba Today, London: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p.37ff.

Mothers train girls in the science of motherhood, domestic mores and particular trade of the family²²¹.

Traders of all shades absorb the aspirants, train them and support them with good amount of money that will enable them establish on their own²²².

The traditional extended family not only provides stability it provides social security and emotional reinforcement to youths and adults. In order to keep the family together, various reinforcement tactics were employed. One of such vital ingredients of affinity employed was "an age-grade labour programme" called *Aaro*, *owe* and *esusu* in Yoruba language. An age labour programme takes root first within the family and it involved different age-grade members from other compounds. In this system, youths and men of a village are divided into age-grades and given specific duties and privileges in the community. The characteristic tasks of the people in such cadres include self-help projects²²³.

The *owe* is a part of the larger group of agnatic and affines kinship obligations. It is the largest labour organisation. This labour unit is commonly employed during preparations for traditional weddings. The family of the prospective groom engages in some manual labour for the family of the bride and consequently employs the service of this group for such²²⁴. Through these age-grade systems, the Yoruba extended community determine the rights and duties of the individual. Through them, the Yoruba have a sense of belonging, a feeling of identity, a useful means of being "my brother's keeper" and finally there is a "group to run to when the going is rough".

It is a binding force that enhances community solidarity and thus any person that exempts himself from any of these grades is an outcast, and he is likely to lose status or his place in the community²²⁵.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Cf. Surdakasa, N., Where Women Work, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973, p.66ff.

²²³ Cf. Ojo, G.A., Op. cit. p.21, p.61; Forde, C.D., Op. cit. p.16 - Forde described this as 'a farmer's mutual aid association'.

²²⁴ Cf. Ojo, G.A., Op. cit. p.61.

²²⁵ An interview with Chief Oyafemi, an informant and an historian, Lagos, December 1994.

It equally enhances the economic viability of an extended community. In the traditional Yoruba community, the age-grade system helped increase the produce as more hands in labour force produce surplus products which in turn are disposed in order to exchange them for some other products they were not able to produce.

This, we were told, initially began in form of trade-by-barter; the farmer who produced more than necessary for his family consumption would give some of his produce to the weaver for example, in exchange for his products and vice-versa. This information is equally confirmed by Clarke when he asserts that: "The interdependence among the different occupations led to internal trade which also became a means for keeping up continual intercommunication among Yoruba towns"²²⁶.

As the idea of market developed, trade among the Yoruba passed from being only trade by barter to trade on monetary values. Some old members of our informants told us that they witnessed the monetary value used at the time. According to them it was called "*eyo owo*" - made of cowrie shells. Their commercial activities spread beyond Yoruba towns, but also embraced external trade with neighbouring groups and some other African kingdoms and subsequently the Portuguese traders around the coast of Africa.

Commerce therefore became an important element in the economy of Yorubaland from the small scale joint practice of the extended family to the extent that by the 17th Century, Europeans (the Portuguese), had established commercial relationships with some of the cities found on the Gulf of Guinea of which Lagos, a gateway to Yorubaland, became one of the most popular commercial centres.

The choice of Lagos as a major commercial centre for the Portuguese was because Yorubaland was one of the territories that possessed one of the items for commercial exchange; slaves were brought to Lagos from where they were transported by ship to America. The coastal city of Lagos as a result became an important city for Europeans who saw it as an in-road into Yorubaland.

The age-grade systems, with the coming of colonialism and rapid social change in the structures of the Yoruba communities, took up a new form by the new city dwellers in the form of clubs and associations of ethnic or clan-based alliance in an attempt to forge relationships with their roots.

²²⁶ Clarke, W.H., Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland 1854-1858, Ibadan: University Press, 1972, p.263.

Language, arts and economic activities reflect the communal nature of the extended family. It is commonly expressed for instance at the transition of the fathers - "*Baba ku, baba ku*", (the father is gone, but father abounds), in obvious reference to members of the family that are willing to give fatherly care, guidance and support namely the uncles and other agnate elders. In like manner it is said that 'leaves drop by the trunk': "*idi igi ni ewe e re si; idi igi ni wowe si*".

2.5 Colonization

2.5.1 Social Changes through Culture Contact

I would like to present here another of the case studies that emerged while on the field.

This is on the problem of reconciling affinity and loyalty to one's homestead and the commercial urban-based home brought about as a result of Yoruba culture contact with the Western world through education and missionary activities.

2.5.1.1 Case Study Three- Late Pa Ogunjemisin

An old man - Late Pa Ogunjemisin hailed from one of the rural villages in Ekiti but left home at a tender age to live and work in Lagos city. He lived all his useful years in Lagos as a successful businessman. He died in Lagos but his immediate family arranged that his remains be taken to the home village for burial.

The villagers refused him burial because they claimed he never identified with the goings on in the village while he was alive and as such according to the spokesperson:

"our village is not a dumping ground for those who never identified with us while they were hale and hearty"²²⁷.

It took concerted efforts of well-meaning citizens of the village to persuade the villagers to accept his remains for burial. Although the children were made to pay some compensation to the village on behalf of their father.

The problem presented in the case study above has been brought about by changes in the socio-political life of the Yoruba society as a result of Westernization through colonization and the missionary enterprise in the early 19th century.

²²⁷ An interview with Chief Omonijo, (aged 67yrs), Asiwaju of Orin-Ekiti, Nov. 10th, 1994.

Yoruba historians succinctly reasoned that forces were unleashed that collided with the norms regulating socio-political life in Yorubaland. According to them, the forces acting severally, and in some cases jointly, upset the balance of power and altered the *modus operandi* of politics in the society²²⁸. Some of these forces are: military, religious, economic and imperial. These forces, according to writers, operated with varying territorial intensity²²⁹. But their effects were similar and had the common result of challenging the *status quo* and introducing a new concept of power and socio-political order.

Historical factors of war or commercial development either through the internal network of markets as has already been noted or long distance trading across the seas could thus exert their own influences on the evolving political culture as factors of change-making for social mobility²³⁰. Writers noted that hot-headed folks arose in the course of the 19th century, who were bent on discarding the existing power structure and establishing new ones²³¹.

Initially, these folks were functionaries of the existing government and owed their rise largely to ascription or to the establishment. But, they were soon out-numbered and out-played by men of talent seeking power by acquisition²³².

This group of hot-heads really wanted more power than the existing power structure gave them. To them what mattered was not hereditary rights or rights conferred by membership of age-sets or titled societies. Rather, they were relying on their physical and

²²⁸ Atanda, J.A., "Collision and Coalition in the Politics and Society of Western Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century" in Ajayi, J.F.A., ed. Evolution of Political Culture in Nigeria, Ibadan: University Press, 1985, p.89., Ajayi, J.F.A., Op. cit.

²²⁹ Cf. Ajayi, J.F.A., Op. cit.; Atanda, J.A., Op. cit.

²³⁰ Cf. Eades, J.S., Op. cit. p.34ff.; Ayandele, E.A., The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, London: Longmans, 1966, p.264-5.

²³¹ Asiwaju, A.I., "From an Egba Refugee Camp to a Nigerian State Capital: Abeokuta, 1830-1930". Lecture delivered to mark the celebrations of the 150th year of Abeokuta, Abeokuta, Mimeographed, 18th Dec. 1980, p.12.

²³² Ibid.

Chapter Two

military powers, as well as economic and organizational ability. This according to Atanda, was also a function of bravery and access to supernatural means like charms, and later firearms²³³. Their rebellion was designed to carve out their own empire. In this they succeeded to an extent, but their victory was pyrrhic. The force they allied with in executing their plans eventually destroyed them. This was Islam, one of the great forces of collision in the 19th century.

It was perhaps not an accident then, that as pillars of the traditional order, the civil chiefs in general and the hereditary monarchs in particular suffered decline in their power and prestige. As Asiwaju rightly asserted:

“...in the abnormal circumstances of the last (19th) century, Yoruba Obas as heads of civil governments lost control to warriors: in Oyo, the Alaafin’s influence was eclipsed by warriors such as Oluyole, Ibikunle, Ogunmola and Are Latoosa. A similar eclipsing effect was produced in Eastern Yorubaland where no Oba in Ijesa and Ekiti could challenge Balogun Ogedengbe as commander of the Ekitiparapo army which fought against Ibadan in the Kiriji war of 1877-1893. In Ijebuland of the same period, an Awujale was actually exiled by Balogun Nafowokan”²³⁴.

This decline in the power and prestige of traditional civil chiefs was further affected by the new pattern of trade and the Christian religion introduced by the Europeans in the 19th Century, as both forces had been operating in the coastal area and the immediate hinterland long before they affected other areas.

In the 19th century, both European trade and Christianity had far-reaching consequences on the politics of the Yoruba society because of the new approach, and the zeal with which both were pursued. For economic and humanitarian reasons, Britain abolished the slave trade, introduced Christianity, and eventually persuaded other Europeans to do so. In its

²³³ Atanda, J.A., Op. cit. p.89.

²³⁴ Asiwaju, A.I., “From an Egba Refugee Camp to a Nigerian State Capital: Abeokuta, 1830-1930”. Lecture delivered to mark the celebrations of the 150th year of Abeokuta at Abeokuta, Mimeographed, 18th Dec. 1980, p.12.

place was to be trade in palm oil and other products, in which the Europeans had earlier traded, but lightly²³⁵.

British interference in the politics of Lagos in 1851 and its subsequent annexation in 1861 marked the commencement of colonial rule in Yorubaland and indeed the entire country which was occupied by a piece-meal process²³⁶. The British occupation of Lagos marked the first major step taken by the British government in the 19th century to acquire economic and political domination over the people of Nigeria²³⁷. Ade Ajayi noted with a critical mind some distorted views adduced by the British for the bombardment of Lagos and its eventual annexation ten years later; for instance, that Lagos was bombarded in 1851 because it was a notorious "slave depot", and that it was annexed in 1861 because "the permanent occupation of this important point in the Bight of Benin is indispensable to the complete suppression of the slave trade"²³⁸. He therefore subscribes to the idea that the anxiety of Britain to intervene in Lagos was not just the philanthropic desire to destroy the slave-trading activities of the Portuguese and Brazilians there, but also the economic desire to control the trade of Lagos from which they had hitherto been excluded and from where they hoped to exploit the resources of the vast country stretching to and beyond the Niger²³⁹.

The Yoruba slave returners, most of them Egba, were called "*the Saros*"²⁴⁰, who had been liberated by the British at Sierra Leone, the missionaries at Badagry - a coastal outlet of the Yorubas, and the British traders invited the British government because they saw in Lagos the gateway to the thickly-populated, prosperous Yoruba country, full of great potentialities for the missionary and the trader. Together, they began to urge the British Government to take

²³⁵ Cf. Ajayi, J.F.A., Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite, London: Longmans, 1965, p.60ff.

²³⁶ Atanda, J.A., Op. cit. p.1.

²³⁷ J.F.Ade, Ajayi, "The British Occupation of Lagos, 1851-61: A Critical Review" in Nigeria Magazine, August 1961. Special feature Lagos Centenary Issue, No 69, Hull: Brown & Sons, Ltd., pp.96-105.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Eades, J.S., Op. cit., p.11.

Akitoye - a run-away king of Lagos under their protection and use him to establish British interests in Lagos²⁴¹.

The very act of intervention by the British government had weakened the position of Akitoye. As a grateful protégé, he accepted the British treaty and the new terms of trade without question. The missionaries and the British traders with the emigrants took as much land as they wished, where they wanted and Akitoye just ratified their acts. By 1892, the British overcame Lagos, the object of which was to put an end to their sovereignty and caution other Yoruba kingdoms²⁴².

The Egba Yoruba secured internal autonomy because of the influence of the Egba returner free slaves and thus became an umbrella of European civilisation and influence in Yorubaland. The missionaries were advanced in the infiltration of the hinterland and often times harbingers of the colonial force.

Mention must be made here that some authors believe that Christianity was the precursor of colonial rule. Ade Ajayi noted with emphasis the prominent role played by the missionaries in organising support for Oba Akitoye. "The missionary party who were more numerous and more influential there actually took the initiative in organising support for Akitoye. In 1842-43, they had established themselves in force at Badagry and were expanding their influence inland towards Abeokuta"²⁴³. Joseph Akinlotan along the same line succinctly noted: "the slave trade and its connection with the white man touched the conscience of the missionaries, and this prompted positive actions as in the form of missionary work"²⁴⁴.

He had earlier opined that Christian missionaries did not limit their work only to spreading the gospel and evangelising the African peoples; they were also greatly involved in

²⁴¹ Ibid. p.99.

²⁴² Osae, T.A., & Odunsi, A.T., A Short History of West Africa A.D. 1800 to the Present, Hodder & Stoughton, 1980, p.91.

²⁴³ J.F.Ade Ajayi, Op. cit. p.99.

²⁴⁴ J.Y., Akinlotan, Managing the Contemporary Roman Church: An analysis of selected aspects of institutional leadership and related organizational issues in the archdiocese of Lagos, Nigeria, Ph.D. Thesis, School of Management, University of Stirling, Scotland., August 1992., p.27.

colonisation activities. According to him, primarily, the missionaries sought to transform the traditional society using the *tabula rasa* method. This meant wiping out everything that was African, and replacing it with Christian religion, European cultures, values, norms and practices. They attempted to make European values important for Africans, who accepted Christianity with all its ecclesiastical norms such as marriage and Western culture²⁴⁵.

His point is further backed up from a writing ascribed to a Church Missionary Society historian:

“Commiserating the condition of the people, and more particularly of the Negro race, on account of the cruel wrongs which the slave trade had inflicted upon them, they selected Africa as their first field of missionary enterprise”²⁴⁶.

The situation in Lagos did not have any effect on the internal wars in the hinterland. The war between Ibadan and Ijaye²⁴⁷, at that time a leading Yoruba town, broke out in March 1860. Oyo was directly involved on the side of Ibadan and soon Abeokuta joined Ijaye. Before long, Ilorin, Ijebu and practically the whole of Yoruba was involved. Thus it directly menaced the overland route. In 1871 a meeting of a number of rulers of Yoruba states was convened followed by treaties with Alaafin of Oyo who had refused the French entreaties earlier, followed by the Egbado who were seeking protection from their turbulent neighbours - Dahomey (the present day Republic of Benin).

Between 1900 and 1960, Yorubaland was administered as the Lagos colony and Southern Protectorate, which in effect implies that there are two sets of law for the same set of people - the traditional and British or Western laws respectively²⁴⁸. Allegiance to these sets of

²⁴⁵ Ibid. pp.23-24.

²⁴⁶ CMS, Church Missionary Atlas, Church Missionary Society, London., 1896, p.11.

²⁴⁷ Ijaye was a very large Yoruba town before the internal wars but faded away as an important Yoruba city after the wars.

²⁴⁸ The clash between adherence to the two laws have created a betrayal on how Christianity has been received in Yorubaland today and in particular when we talk of marriage and family life.

laws has created more pronounced problems within Yoruba society and indeed among Africans today. The Western or British laws have come to remain the state laws while the traditional laws have, up till the present times, remained a force among Yoruba societies. Both demands allegiance.

In order to effectively maintain their hold on the Yoruba nation, the British put in motion various machineries that would attract and woo the elites to their own programme of colonization that would thereby separate them from the traditional society and their so-called loyalty syndrome.

The first major breakthrough in this bid was the creation of colonial cities and towns. The spatial location of colonial towns is an indication of the nature of the relationship. The colonial authorities were concerned with dominance in the interests of commerce. Therefore, some conveniently placed villages grew into towns because they became administrative centres - a place from which district officers could tour and supervise the countryside²⁴⁹. The resultant influence of this dominance with its commercial overtones had far-reaching effects on urban development. European ideas of architecture and town planning were superimposed on earlier patterns.

We observed during the field work a sharp distinction between the pattern of houses in heterogenous cities such as Lagos and the countryside like Inisha in Osun State. The rural-based residential pattern in most villages still retained their customary rectangular residential pattern unit which reflects the existence of the traditional principles of lineage association. For example, at Omu-Ekiti in Oye Local Government of Ondo-State, the Osatuyi family of about a hundred members still retain their customary residential pattern reflecting the existence of the traditional principles of lineage association. However, it is difficult to see a well-distinct traditional Yoruba residential pattern even in rural areas without having a foreign touch in a way. So it could be justified on the observed basis that while Nigerian urban areas are beginning to take on some of the characteristics of Western urban areas, this phenomenon has had little effect on the rural Yoruba family with regard to residence. This is evident from many examples like the Osatuyi family that are still essentially made up of several sectors or

²⁴⁹ Peil, M., & Sada, P., African Urban City, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1984.

wards, each under the traditional authority of a chief or sub-chief and each containing the compounds of large, extended-family groups which regard the compound as home²⁵⁰.

Most migrants into urban areas regard whatever buildings they own in cities as commercial buildings, while their home-based buildings maintain the status of their permanent abode. And they in most cases retire to these country homes when old. Even when they die in cities, the family still take their remains to the family homestead in the village as the lasting burial place²⁵¹.

The improvement of communications through new roads and railways and the establishment of national and district headquarters meant that new towns arose and villages grew into cities, whereas some formerly important Yoruba towns which were bypassed by the railway, designed mainly to evacuate cash crops, lost population and functions. This situation attracted to the cities a large number of strangers to trade and take up jobs like repairing cars, building, clerking for the trading companies, and teaching in the schools²⁵². This situation altered the urban hierarchy and resulted in slow-growth for towns no longer on major transportation routes²⁵³.

Two different operative systems are thus perceived with the wave of colonialism; that of exerting influence in the newly-developed commercial centres and the waning of the former indigenous cities.

²⁵⁰ Bascom, W., "Urbanization among the Yoruba", in The American Journal of Sociology, 1955, LX: 446-454. His study was based on an assessment of Louis Wirth's definition of the city, based on an investigation of the size, density, permanency, and social heterogeneity of Yoruba communities.

²⁵¹ The case study presented on late Ogunjemisin serves as evidence of the Yoruba's close affinity to their place of origin. When they migrate to cities, they still regard their place of origin as home-base or homestead.

²⁵² Owusu, M., Uses and Abuses of Political Power: A case study of continuity and change in the politics of Ghana, Chicago: University Press, 1970.

²⁵³ Mabogunje, A.L., Urbanization in Nigeria, London: University of London Press, 1968, p.144.

In addition, new ways of establishing the supremacy of the colonial cities and reign emerged. There were new ways to get ahead which often meant separating oneself from one's extended family, geographically if not psychologically. The enforced peace between formerly warring groups which gave strangers more security made it easier for those who wanted to escape their extended family or village to do so.

Social change in colonial Yoruba was brought about largely by the imposition of Western education, Western economic forces and Western political structures and ideas²⁵⁴. European forms of education and a wide variety of new occupations drew migrants to the towns.

The introduction of evangelization and education by missionaries and school teachers captivated the Yoruba and changed their minds and ideas, while agriculture oriented towards the cultivation of new crops, was a prerequisites for abolishing the slave trade and replacing it with the much-vaunted trade in agricultural sylvan products. According to Afigbo, Western education contributed in other respects to change many facets of African social life. Thus, it added to the problem of rural-urban disparity, a problem which either came into existence or worsened with colonial rule²⁵⁵. For example, in the early years of colonial rule when post-primary schools were few and far between, most of the existing ones were sited in the urban or budding urban centres for a variety of good reasons. Consequently, promising rural children who had the will and the means to pursue their education beyond the primary school, had to make the pilgrimage to the towns²⁵⁶. This tended to wean African children from the control and influence of their families. The child who had stayed away from home for so long, had acquired the art of reading and writing, had learnt the language of the colonizing power, had acquired new dress-habits and new food tastes and had learned explanations different from

²⁵⁴ Cf. Afigbo, A.E., "Education, Urbanization and Social Change in Colonial Africa" in Kalu, O.U., (ed.), African Cultural Development, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Pub. Ltd., 1978, p.131-132.

²⁵⁵ Afigbo, A.E., Op. cit. p.141-142.

²⁵⁶ Pa Adefemi, an informant who told us that he came to settle in Lagos through this system.

those of the elders for old, familiar phenomena, was bound to be isolated from his kinsmen who had never been to school²⁵⁷.

In that case if such a child was ostentatious, as most of the first graduates of the schools were inclined to be, the tendency to parade this new knowledge was bound to create problems of communication between him and his people.

The move by Western education to set its products apart from the rest of society had one of its most outstanding effects on African social structures - the rise of a new elite. In pre-colonial traditional Yoruba society for example, they had their elites²⁵⁸. Among these as earlier pointed out were the traditional chiefs, priests and war-leaders many of whom normally owed their elitist status to birth. But, in addition, there were successful farmers and businessmen who generally owed their leading position to achievement. Now colonial rule created new challenges which the traditional elite were ill-equipped to meet, but which the graduates of the Western- oriented schools could easily cope with. This resulted in this new elitist group asserting their claim to leadership in the new situation and with time, came to be looked upon as leaders and pace-setters²⁵⁹.

It must be noted here that for most members of the new elite their vantage point lay in their education which gave them access to the scientific skill and social thought of the Western world, equipped them to enter into dialogue with the colonial authorities on the destiny of the colony, and familiarized them with the social fashions of Europe, all of which made their life-style an example to be emulated by their country people²⁶⁰.

Mair has shown that for the nationalist era, some of them gained admission to this rank either because they had made money from large-scale farming or business and could help finance the political agitation of their better-educated but poorer brethren, or they controlled mass organisations such as labour unions, and could give the better educated elite the kind of mass-support which they needed to convince the colonial power that they spoke for the

²⁵⁷ Afigbo, A.E., "Education, Urbanization and Social Change in Colonial Africa" in Ogbu U. Kalu, ed., African Cultural Development, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Pub. Ltd., 1978, pp.129-149.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Ajayi, J.F.A., Op. cit.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Afigbo, A.E., Op. cit. pp.129-149.

people²⁶¹. It is largely this wide variation in their qualifications that makes it difficult to define precisely who were the new elite of colonial Africa.

Many of the elitist group came from the group which, in pre-colonial times, would have been classified as commoners. For example, in the Yoruba traditional society, the returner slaves who were nicknamed emigrants were the first to embrace Westernization because of their earlier contact with Western powers during slave trade era. Some were even of the servile class due to the practice that it was often members of these classes who were first made to embrace Western education, while the traditional elite for the most part stood back. But as soon as the benefits of Western education were demonstrated, members of the traditional elite also joined in. Many colonial powers, especially France and Britain, deliberately set out with varying results to encourage this class by establishing special schools for them²⁶².

Thus the ranks of the new elite contained people from different strata of society, making it reasonable to talk in general terms of conflict between the new elite and the traditional rulers. Afigbo has shown how in some of the West African countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia, the elite class was made up of people who were not indigenous to these territories. In this case, there was an understandable tendency for the elite communities of the coast to be in conflict and competition with the traditional societies of the interior. The former were inclined to be contemptuous of the latter who, in turn, harboured an abiding suspicion of them. In the 19th century Gold Coast (modern Ghana) and Yorubaland, the founding members of the new elite group were, or at least believed they were, related by blood to the peoples of the interior²⁶³.

The result was that throughout the 19th century, and even into the early part of this century, the new and old elites built up a tradition of co-operation, the new elites being regarded as those who mediated between their indigenous societies and Western culture. After

²⁶¹ Mair, L., "New Elites in East and West Africa" in V. Turner, ed., Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960., Vol.III, Cambridge University Press, 1971, p.171.

²⁶² Lord Hailey, "Emergent Elites of Black Africa 1900-1950", in L.H. Gann, & P. Duignan, Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960., Vol.II, Cambridge University Press, (1970), pp.358-359.

²⁶³ Afigbo, A.E., Op. cit. p.144.

all, there pervades the belief that they had been sent to school to learn new techniques in order to increase the ability of their people to meet the problems posed by the European presence. Such co-operation existed among the Egba people of Yorubaland and the Ashanti of Ghana. The new elite worked closely with the traditional elite in an effort to build a new society and ward off European rule. But these efforts failed and bred a lot of strains and stresses in their relationship. The new elite had wrongly hoped that Europe was out to modernise Africa and would use members of their group as the instruments for achieving that goal since they were well-fitted for it. The presupposition that they had acquired Western skills, techniques, and ideas and believed they could best introduce these to their less-informed brethren proved abortive. Their disappointment came from the colonial bureaucrats who had edged them out by assuming the role which the new elite had cut out for themselves. Instead of taking the new elite into partnership, the administration preferred the traditional rulers whom they could manoeuvre and treated not as equal but as subordinates and subsequently relegated to the area of local government. This was particularly so in British Africa where a determined effort was made to preserve the old ruling families in order to have their backings in matters relating to administration and economy²⁶⁴. This kind of 'seek-and-game' tactics by the colonials generated an open opposition from the elites as the traditional rulers could not join them for fear of losing their positions if opposed to the colonial powers. Yet, in the word of Kimble, the traditional rulers regarded the new elite as revolutionaries who wanted to destroy immemorial custom and turn the world upside down²⁶⁵.

2.5.2 Emergence of New Association and its Effects

One of the end-products of colonial interference in the politics and polities of the traditional Yoruba society was the emergence of different associations set up in heterogenous city communities developed to cater for the needs of the new elite.

²⁶⁴ This is particularly true with the British involvement in the politics of Nigeria. The amalgamation of the North and South of Nigeria in 1914 by Lugard set in motion the Northern Oligarchy and gave them administrative powers larger than he gave the South. For details see: Kukah, M.H., Religion and Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria, Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Ltd., 1993, Chapter One.

²⁶⁵ Kimble, D., A Political History of Ghana, 1850-1928, London: Oxford University Press, 1963, pp.389-396.

Apart from creating the conditions for the rise of the new elite, colonial rule introduced other changes in the structure of Yoruba society. One of such was the rise of new organisations which helped to mediate the adjustment of many individuals and their rural homes to the new demands and norms of colonial society.

Social scientists have described these organizations as 'voluntary'²⁶⁶. They are voluntary in the sense that people are not born into them as they are born into lineages, villages or ethnic groups. But closer analysis shows that for some of them, especially the ethnic-based welfare or improvement associations, membership is not really voluntary since the practical alternative to membership generally means ostracism from society.

Researchers posit that the social conditions that brought these organizations into being generally originated in the new urban centres, although some of these associations, especially the ethnic-based ones, in time established home branches²⁶⁷. The fact was that as Wallerstein has aptly put it, migration from "the traditional rural to the modern urban area" led to "dislocation and disorientation for the individual"²⁶⁸. Since neither the traditional society nor the colonial administration had the means to meet the new needs of such migrants, they had to

²⁶⁶ Mair, L., "New Elites in East and West Africa", in V. Turner, ed., Colonialism in Africa, 1860-1960. Vol.III Cambridge University Press, 1971, p.171.; Lloyd, P.C., Africa in Social Change, Maryland: Baltimore, 1969, pp.125-56; Webster, J.B., "The Emergence of a New Elite in Africa", in J.C. Anene and G.N. Brown, eds., Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Ibadan: University Press, 1966.

²⁶⁷ There were lots of meetings of such associations witnessed by the researcher during his stay in Regina Mundi Parish in Lagos metropolis. The Church effectively made some money out of this venture by renting out their hall to communities of various ethnic affiliations. Such meetings sometimes involve launching for various self-help projects embarked in their villages. So the Lagos branch may send the proceeds of their launching home as a group. This is a common phenomenon witnessed in various urban centres in Nigeria today.

²⁶⁸ Wallerstein, "Voluntary Associations" in J.S. Coleman and C.G. Rosberg, eds., Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970, p.319.

evolve their own institutions, systems and norms for achieving meaningful existence in the strange and heady social environment of the town. This view echoed the optimism of urban sociologists like Lewis Mumford who saw urban development as producing a better and more comfortable life for everyone²⁶⁹.

While this theory is tenable in the developed world, it is not all that tenable in the developing world of Africa. African urbanisation does not automatically integrate ethnic cultures, nor can it cope with the massive poverty of rural-urban migrants. On the contrary, a case can be made that African urbanisation, especially in Nigeria, is a contributor to a universal anti-culture, a movement that erodes and undermines traditional cultures, by impoverishing them, diminishing human sensibilities, devaluing primary symbols and substituting material for moral and spiritual goals. By creating material slums, it begets spiritual slums, and promotes cultural ignorance and degradation. The culture it creates is one of silence and desperate survival.

The Catholic Bishops of Nigeria recognise the socio-economic problems posed by rural-urban drifts in Nigeria and promptly noted this fact in their communiqué after their plenary meeting in Lagos, February 22-25, 1994:

“In this prolonged distress of the nation, the family has over and over again proved to be for many people the last and only place of refuge and security. Heroic generosity, admirable patience and a strong sense of solidarity in families are keeping afloat a large number of people sinking in the economic morass”²⁷⁰.

This was easily perceived in the field when an old woman, **Mama Sade**, one of the interviewees, sharply interjected as soon as we opened discussion on urbanisation: “*Gbogbo ohun ti o dara Eko loni*” (anything odd is Lagosian in orientation) when asked to comment further, she retorted:

²⁶⁹ Mumford, L., City Development, London: Secker & Warburg, 1946.

²⁷⁰ "Save the Family and Save the Nation", Communiqué, Plenary meeting of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria held in Saint Leo's Parish, Ikeja, Lagos State, February 22nd-25th, 1994, in C. Onwuli ed., The Church and the Family, Nigeria: Port-Harcourt, (1994), pp.176-177.

“We do not know the system we belong to, everything done is done under the name of civilisation”²⁷¹.

We even noticed this expressed in their language. For example, a traditional Yoruba person refers to the word civilization as “*olaju*” which is derogatory in usage. One of those interviewed further expressed it in this way: “*Gbogbo iwa palapala ti aye ode oni ni ilu Eko, awonlomowe ni igbalode ni*”- whatever antisocial behaviour pervading in Lagos city today is seen by the educated as civilization or urbanisation²⁷². For example, he talks about the various soap operas watched on the television screens and in film houses today as being unrealistic; because they are imported they have no bearing on the basic Yoruba ethos. They are imported from America, talking about an American way of life which remains unhelpful to building up Yoruba society.

He compared these operas with what was operative when he was young. According to him:

“Parents encouraged their children to go to theatres, traditional dancing festivals like the Eyo festival (a popular masquerade festival in Lagos) and traditional music shows because they are avenues where children learn by practice and the messages they conveyed would help them in their future life careers. Such a message functions as a central element to religious ritual and ceremony, an expression of social organisation; a medium of the declaration of authority and the declaration of loyalty; an expression of a community’s economic life; a medium of education; a channel for physical fitness and a medium for recreation in its less formally organised version; but today what you find out in these imported films and dances is nothing but a way of exposing the young to dangers of becoming deviant in the society”²⁷³.

Hachten, who documented Iain McLellan’s critique of television in Africa, equally give credence to Adefemi’s observation in these terms:

²⁷¹ Tape-recorded interview with Mama Sade, an informant.

²⁷² Tape-recorded interview with Pa Adefemi, 75yrs old, a retired educationalist from Usi-Ekiti, Ondo State but who lived and work in Lagos, April 1995.

²⁷³ An interview with Pa Adefemi, 75yrs old, a retired educationalist from Usi-Ekiti, Ondo State but who lived and work in Lagos, April 1995.

“And instead of nurturing traditional cultural values, television has eroded them by offering a large amount of imported programming...Television takes the lion's share of limited communication budgets, so that there is little money left to be spent on other media that are more effective in reaching those with the greatest need for information and development”²⁷⁴.

The studies of Gordon Wilson in East Africa have shown that there was a clear correlation between the pressure of colonial society and the formation of these voluntary associations. Thus Kenyan Africans, whose traditional culture came under unusually severe pressure from colonial rule and settler aggressiveness, had stronger, and many more, ethnic associations than neighbouring territories such as Tanzania and Uganda²⁷⁵. There was thus a strong desire for individual and group protection in the formation of voluntary organisations. Furthermore, urban conditions of existence created opportunities that made it relatively easy to form such organisations since as Thomas Hodgkin has put it, it provided “physical centres where men and women, with particular interests in common, can collide with one another”²⁷⁶.

Some of these voluntary organisations can be described as purely “social”, that is devoted to promoting conviviality and relaxation. In a society without a national system of social insurance such as Nigeria, membership of a mutually-supportive group of people is the only way of spreading the risks of unemployment, sickness, or destitution in old age, apart from personal savings. The family is not the only such group in Nigeria; clan and tribal associations, and even spontaneously evolved groups of friends might exist in part to help each other in misfortune - but it is probably the most universal.

We observed during the field work in the Lagos metropolis the various associations in existence to cater for groups sharing the same goals and aspirations. One such is the Landlords and Tenants Association operating in many areas of the Lagos metropolis as a result of the alarming rate of crimes, ranging from housebreaking to armed-robbery etc. The landlords and tenants in particular streets organize themselves into ‘vigilante’ groups in order to curb the

²⁷⁴ Cf. Iain McLellan cited in Hachten, W.A., The Growth of Media in the Third World: African Failures, Asian Successes, Iowa: Iowa State University, 1993, p.37.

²⁷⁵ G.M., Wilson, "The African Elite" in S. Diamond and F.G. Burke, eds., The Transformation of East Africa.

²⁷⁶ Hodgkin, T., Nationalism in Colonial Africa, New York: University Press, 1967, p.84.

menace of armed-robbery and house breaking in their streets. We got involved in one of these vigilante watches when visiting my immediate family in an area noted for hoodlums in Lagos as it was the turn of those of his family to keep watch over the streets that night. One fascinating experience about the association is that through their regular meetings they have come to know virtually everybody living in the street, so it makes it easier for them to identify residents of that street and could help discover any strange movement or visitor to the environment.

We equally observed during the field work that situations like the case cited above have created increased insecurity. When asked the reasons for the increase, a consensus of opinion focused on the socio-economic, rural-urban drift and political instability in the country. In Lagos alone, the number of newcomers in the city creates a constant stream of unassimilated unemployed. Because Lagos remains the major economic capital of Nigeria, lots of migrants flow into the place on a daily basis for greener pastures even when they are not assured of employment opportunities. This brings about city dwellers meeting up with people who are not bound by the same moral code and who challenge traditional village beliefs and customs. The wishes and desires of the individual are stimulated by the conspicuous display of material goods and the ease with which sensuous desires can be satisfied.

All of these have in a sense facilitated the development of delinquency and crime. The communiqué of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria lent more weight to this point when they affirmed:



“The moral life of a Nation is nurtured and developed in a special way within the family. It is here that the virtues of love and care, honesty and fairness, fidelity and responsible sexual behaviour are lived out and transmitted to the youth. Many Nigerian families have lost their moral point of reference. The children more easily learn bad aspects of the behaviour of their parents than copy their good examples. Juvenile delinquency is almost always a case of parental moral irresponsibility”²⁷⁷.

One of our informants has this point to make when asked “What effect has the present socio-economic situation, the influence of the media and rural-urban drift situation in Nigeria had on the Christian Church, marriage and the families”?

²⁷⁷ Catholic Bishops of Nigeria Communiqué, Op. cit. p.178.

“Today we are witnesses to the erosion of some of the healthiest of our traditional community values concerning marriage and family living. Unhealthy attitudes and patterns of behaviour are imported from abroad. Migration to the large and impersonal cities in search for work and wealth bring about the loss of the cultural supports for marriage and family life. We also notice a tendency to lose the sense of the sacredness of marriage and the discipline it imposes on men and women. Economic pressure has liberated the woman and the family is in disarray, because the husband and the wife often times have to work separated from each other. By far the most alarming situation is the neglect of the proper upbringing of the children. Education in Nigeria has been secularized and the religious formation in schools is either marginal or non-existent”²⁷⁸.

City life poses a threat, drawing into its sphere people of many geographic and ethnic backgrounds, and providing a division of labour and a heterogeneous class structure. The urban dweller loses the economic and psychological security of the extended family or tribe and the self-sufficient rural community. Urban life is in many ways less secure than a farming economy. For example, crops may fail, drought may bring famine, but the land is still there. On the other hand, in the city you may lose your job at any time, and there is nothing to fall back on but the goodwill of your friends, your neighbours and your relations. Thus according to Peter Marris, in the search for security there are two resources: “to get a permanent, well-paid job, to save, earn a pension, buy property; or to maintain and remain a loyal member of a group wide enough to find the means to guard you against destitution”²⁷⁹.

Post-independent Africa is today witnessing a lot of conflicts from very many quarters. The youths, as has been noted, are caught in the conflicts of social change and reconstruction which challenge traditional tribal life. Instead of gaining a larger measure of freedom from the West, they are being constantly drawn closer to it through new economic and political relationships, and thus their national revolution is, as it were, requiring them to support those forces which are challenging the whole idea of a separate African cultural and social entity. We discover that class distinctions abound now in cities. For example, there are certain residential areas in the Lagos metropolis that are set aside for those within the upper-

²⁷⁸ Interview from Arch-Bishop John Onayekan, Catholic Arch-Bishop of Abuja, vice president, African Synod of Bishops, (aged 53yrs), Date of interview 22nd May 1995 in his residence Abuja, Nigeria.

²⁷⁹ Marris, P., *Op. cit.*

class group²⁸⁰. These are people who have successfully established themselves in well-paid jobs, and see the demands of their relatives as a burdensome nuisance. Each one thinks that he/she does not need them because to him, his own position is secured, and his children's future depends on the education he can buy for them. The exchange of help in the family is no longer reciprocal - he is always giving, and stands to get nothing of value in return.

In these circumstances, the successful are likely to restrict the range of kinsfolk towards whom they can recognise an obligation. This is not simply selfishness. Their education and their position face them with expensive demands, and values which conflict with those of their kin. In such situations, returning to the home village can be an uncomfortable experience. Relatives greet them whom they do not recognise; there are complaints of neglect, of having forgotten the family; grandparents demand that the grandchildren stay with them, in conditions which the educated parents can no longer accept as safe for the children's health. All these annoyances, social embarrassments, mutual misunderstandings, feelings of guilt perhaps, contribute to the isolation of the rich. This may bring about a gradual process of disengagement, by which the few who succeed in gaining the ultimate rewards of education consolidate their advantage. Their children attend private institutions of higher qualities than the proletariat children. Institutions like the international schools are meant for them and of course children of such high-class people have motor cars for their use by the time they enter the university. There is money for good schools, extra tuition, educated parents who can help them with their school work, and comfortable, well-lit rooms to work in. So they stand a very good chance of acquiring, in their turn, occupations equivalent to their parents. As this happens evidence emerges that the consolidation of a prosperous upper-class reacts upon the rest of the society. It is glaring among the city dwellers in Nigeria today that because of these class distinctions and the wealth of the country in the hands of the few, many now try to make it at all costs either by hook or by crook. Hence from interviews we gathered that this has seriously affected the morale of the community. According to Paul Babatunde, an informant:

“everybody wants to get rich at all cost and wants to live big”,²⁸¹.

²⁸⁰ Places like Victoria Island, Ikoyi, Allen Avenue in Ikeja are notable areas for who is who in Lagos. A low-class earner can not afford to live in those areas.

²⁸¹ Mr. Babatunde, an informant from Lagos.

In a bid to meet up with the upper-class, many resort to robbery, cheating by defrauding and taking bribes, already referred to above as *egunje*.

The effect goes further than that, ordinary people will recognise that educational opportunities are not, after all so open; the children of the upper-class hold a strong advantage. And they will see that educational ambition is, from the point of view of those who are well-off, disruptive of the system of mutual help on which they, the ordinary people, depend. So invariably they may begin to discourage ambitions in their children which would raise them too far above their kinsfolk. The situation becomes that the man who gets on is the one who cheats others, kicks his fellows in the teeth, sucks up to his boss. That situation seems to apply to a significant number of contemporary post oil-boom Yoruba, who like their Igbo, Hausa, Fulani, Ijo, Ibibio, and Bini counterparts in modern-day Nigeria, are sacrificing the essential element of the measurement of worthwhile living for crude material accumulation galvanized by a predatory, anything-goes-mentality.

Perhaps the lesson of contemporary anthropological studies of African moral systems is that, in the meeting of African traditional systems with extraneous powerful foreign cultural systems, the result is the creation of a new breed of Africans who are “between and betwixt by nature”. Attempting to walk on the two roads of Western and African cultures at the same time, without deep roots in either except the desire to exploit for individual aggrandizement, this new breed are both a danger to themselves and to ordinary people whose legitimation is the ancestral earth and the sense of loyalty which obliges one to share resources and care for others. There remains to a considerable extent, an indifference to education from the perspective mentioned above which covers a fear of losing their children from their world. In the same way, it seems likely that urban manual workers in African cities may evolve rather similar values. They will want their children to go to school, for without some education there is little chance of employment. But at the same time they would want to maintain the ties through increasingly discouraging their children from seeking to rise too high. They will rather like to emphasise the obligations of loyalty to family and neighbourhood.

From the foregoing discussions, three different categories of classes was noticed as emerging from the heterogeneous modern Yoruba cities drawing on the experience and the indoctrination from other societies.

(i) Membership of a mutually supportive group, and personal achievement, are both means to economic security. Where they can, people will seek both kinds of insurance against hardship. I observed this during the field work when I was invited to a night club in Ikeja

reservation areas of the upper-class group. The party that night was organized by youths between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years or a little over, who are privileged children of the rich. It was glaring that night that nearly all the invitees and the organizers were children of those in the society. They displayed this during the party. I was so lost in the crowd that I almost forgot I was in Nigeria; I thought I was back in one of the Scottish night raves.

(ii) Mutually supportive groups tend to break down, when there is a wide disparity between resources of their members, since help given and received no longer balance in the long run. Cases of this came to the fore during the field work. This is commonly noticed in the villages where parents and the extended family make excessive demands on their wards living in cities. We have earlier cited the case of Abioje's family who were equally looking up to their children abroad in cities for some plunder from their living.

Because of situations like this, one of the informants categorically denied extended family involvement in their marriage. He said "the extended family has no role in my family life". Some even go further by saying that there should not be traditional weddings.

(iii) In these circumstances, people are forced to choose their priorities, either abandoning the group for the sake of their ambitions, or limiting ambition for the sake of the group. Even though these are ultimately individual choices, they might be influenced by the prevailing values of the community where an individual grows up.

From these assumptions, one can go on to suggest how family relationships at different economic levels may work themselves out.

a) Where everyone in the family is well-educated, and has the chance of a good job, there is no conflict between family loyalty and individual ambition. Here family ties reinforce vocational aspirations - approving and guiding them, and providing introductions and job opportunities. Since parents can usually succeed in passing on their educational advantages to their children, such a uniformly prosperous kin group is likely to evolve in the second generation as an emerging elite.

From the responses to the interviews, the influence of parents on job and marriage there is a consensus of opinions across the literate interviewed that "the job of my children can be influenced by counselling". This response was further tested on five different families in the upper-class group where most of their children take after their professional callings. Three of the parents are medical doctors while the other two are engineers and we discovered that all their first-born children invariably took to their father's professions.

In this sense, families belonging to this group will definitely emerge elitist in the second and subsequent generations.

We equally discovered similar values in some of the unlettered families where a father is a successful trader and involved his children in the trade and the children subsequently become full time and prosperous traders. Such groups abound among the Oro traders in Jankara market of Lagos metropolis; we also find most Ibos in Oladipo market in Mushin selling automobile spare parts belonging to this group. So these groups are found in the different class-categories in the city.

b) Below this level of economic advantage, people may have to choose between group solidarity and individual ambition. The closer they are to the elite, the more they are likely to urge their children up the final rungs of the educational ladder which they themselves failed to grasp, even if this means repudiating relationships with those who cannot keep pace with them.

c) But manual workers, to whom higher education and professions are much more remote and difficult to grasp, may be more likely to emphasise loyalties and mistrust ambition.

d) Finally, where people are too desperately poor to support each other anyway, there is neither an integrated family group, nor any faith in legitimate ambition. Here people tend to admire more or less criminal, or at least unconventional kinds of achievement.

We observed this point with Lagos touts and the street-hawkers. Most of them have no integrated and co-ordinated families who can look after their welfare. There are lots of drop-outs from schools in Lagos involved in criminal activities. About fifty of them were reportedly rounded up around the area we stayed during the field-work; each of them had no fixed address nor next of kin to contact.

2.5.3 Ethnicity or Tribal Association

The African city has become poly-ethnic and may equally be seen from Aylward Shorter's description as "a crucible for ethnic cultures"²⁸². Tribal identity or rather, a more particular loyalty to the district of one's origin became an important principle of organisation, not so much to conserve a cultural tradition as to meet a variety of new needs.

These were an extension of rural ethnicity or "tribalism" to the urban area. There developed different hierarchies of the unions: village, clan and "tribal" unions. These had two main functions. One was to help the individual who had newly migrated to the town to adjust

²⁸² Shorter, A., The Church in the African City, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991.

as smoothly as possible to the conditions of urban life. Thus when a migrant first reached town, he usually made his first contacts with members of his village or clan union who would help to find him accommodation, to introduce him to employers of labour or master-craftsmen, and to teach him modern skills. They also taught him how to comport himself in the city.

Through such associations, members received help when in difficulty. They could get loans to continue their business if they sustained crippling losses. Funeral, marriage, and other expenses approved by the association could also be met with loans or donations from the group²⁸³.

The other function of the ethnic unions according to Hodgkin was "to provide a channel for progressive public opinion at home"²⁸⁴, especially through maintaining an organized link between the sons at home and the sons abroad"²⁸⁵. To do this the unions had to take an interest in the political and social development of their homes.

This was observed during the field work as playing a vital role in self-help projects and programmes taking place in a lot of towns and villages. It is now becoming a universal idea that towns and villages set aside at least a weekend or a week-long programme of activities in the year whereby sons and daughters, friends and invited guests of a particular town or village are gathered to celebrate what they now tag as "town-day".

A particular town-day is seen in contemporary Nigeria as a multipurpose avenue for launching the development of social amenities in that town or village. It is equally a way of bringing together sons and daughters of that place, pledging loyalty to the common cause of the community. I attended two such towns' days during the field work and the responses to the question asked about the importance of their town's day portray a common interest in the political and social development of their homes. Agendas or programmes of self-help are very common in Nigeria today because of the break down in the governmental mechanism. So lots

²⁸³ For a very good analysis of the rise and function of a voluntary association of the ethnic-based type see M. Banton, "Adaptation and Integration in the Social System of Temme Immigrants in Freetown", in Wallerstein ed., Change: the Colonial Situation, Op. cit. pp.402-419.

²⁸⁴ Op. cit. p.86.

²⁸⁵ Yesufu, T.M., An Introduction to Industrial Relations in Nigeria, London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

of communities embark on self-help programmes or projects, for if they wait for various arms of the government parastatals to do them, they will wait indefinitely and may not get it done.

At first during the colonial era this system won these associations the opposition and obstruction of suspicious European officers. In time, however, the latter recognized their capacity for good and began to consult them in matters such as taxation, education, and community development. So here we see how tribal membership remains important in another sense: as a means of relating oneself to others in a wider social context. That is, tribal membership no longer defines the structure of relationships within which a person acts out his life: rather, it defines an aspect of his relationships with others in a social environment which includes members of many different tribes.

From this view-point, it becomes easier to see how tribalism in contemporary Africa and especially in Nigeria can both help and hinder the evolution of a national society. In the first place, it provides the newcomer to the city with an immediate frame of reference by which to find his place. Where is he to stay? Who can he approach for help? Who should he turn to in search of a job? The obvious answer is his/her 'country people'. At the same time he can make at least a crude adjustment to the strangers about him, in terms of tribal stereotypes. So tribalism is a means of defining your relationships to others in the unfamiliar urban environment. It can also be a basis for organising a variety of social welfare functions like the type of launching noted earlier or weddings, naming ceremonies, burials etc. As such it can become the most effective system of dealing with social problems available, in the absence of a national system of social security: and it will be a long time before African nations can afford to establish comprehensive social insurance and welfare services on the British or Scandinavian model.

Finally, tribal loyalty cuts across the emerging divisions with African society. It appeals across differences of class, of occupation, of income, to a common interest in the welfare and prestige of one's native place. Tribalism is an egalitarian influence in urban society, restraining the consolidation of class interests. Since tribalism is more often attacked than defended, it is important therefore to recognize both its usefulness and its inevitability from the foregoing discussion.

Tribalism has even taking its toll in a lot of Christian religious activities. For example, the different societies in Regina Mundi parish, Lagos, carry out their activities through ethnic affiliations. We noticed that the 1994 annual harvest thanksgiving was fleshed

out in Nigerian ethnic manner²⁸⁶. For example when societies were called out for their thanksgivings, St. Jude's society came out under the umbrella of the Ekiti sub group in the Church, while St. Anthony's group bears the Ibo's ethnic group of eastern Nigeria. There is even a preference for a particular priest, often from a particular ethnic group to minister in parishes where majority of the Church members are from that group. Where this is not adhered to, individual groups at times often invite priests from their home base during activities involving their societies such as weddings, the harvest thanksgiving of a Lagos branch of a particular ethnic village or parish and other social functions²⁸⁷.

It is to curb excesses such as these that the Archdiocese of Lagos enacted some laws banning Concelebration or invitations to priests outside the diocese without the express permission of the ordinary of the diocese - the bishop.

This aspect was more amplified in an interview with Archbishop Onayekan, (the vice-president of the African Synod of Bishops that took place in Rome) on the question of tribalism in the Church. He cited the civil wars in Rwanda caused by ethnic dissension where Catholic Hutus massacred their fellow catholic Tutsis on tribal sentimentality. He cited the argument of another bishop based on blood and water:

“that the situation in Rwanda depicts that the ethnic blood is thicker than water and even thicker than the water of baptism”.

The blood of the tribe in their case is thicker than the loyalty and the blood of Christ. This argument was used during the Rwandan tragedy:

²⁸⁶ Harvest Thanksgiving is a way of generating funds for the various Church's projects. This is very much a Nigerian or may be African affair. It is a universally acceptable way of generating money for the Christian Churches in Nigeria. This is a form of tithes paid for benefits received from God during the Year.

²⁸⁷ This was equally observed among the Oro people living and worshipping at Idumagbo in Lagos and among the Ibos in Regina Mundi Parish. Proceeds from such Village Church Thanksgivings are sent back to their parish in their home place.

“regardless of the society affiliation, once you are not a Hutu, you must be killed, this is the mystery of evil and shallowness of faith”²⁸⁸.

The need to empty ourselves of this vice can hardly be overemphasized. Nor can we continue to brush it under the carpet or become emotional or defensive about it. Without doubt, according to Teresa Okure:

“tribalism in its manifold expressions constitutes the single most important force crippling the growth of the Church in Nigeria”²⁸⁹.

John Paul II singled out tribalism, during his visit to Nigeria in 1982, as one of the problems which the Nigerian Bishops needed to combat through “a well-considered and united action”²⁹⁰. This is because tribalism, like racism, is as Paul VI would observe:

“foreign to the mind of Christ”, “contrary to God’s intent”, and “an obstacle to the building up of the Church and a juster society”²⁹¹.

It thus runs clean counter to the mission of Jesus and the core of the Gospel message for it imprisons and impoverishes the one who practices it and divides, discriminates and excludes others. This we have seen from our observation mentioned earlier at Regina Mundi parish during the field survey. Jesus, on the contrary, came specifically to liberate, enrich, gather together, reconcile and reunite all peoples to God and to one another in his own

²⁸⁸ Archbishop Onayekan, Op. cit.

²⁸⁹ Okure, T., SHCJ, "Inculturation in the New Testament: Its Relevance for the Nigerian Church" in Inculturation in Nigeria: Proceedings of Catholic Bishop's Study Session, Lagos: Catholic Secretariat Pub., August, 1989. p.52.

²⁹⁰ Address to the Nigerian Bishops, Lagos, February 15th, 1982, in Pope John Paul II in Nigeria, Feb. 12th-17th, 1982, Homilies and Addresses: Complete and Unabridged, Port-Harcourt: Marian Books, 1982, p.38.

²⁹¹ Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*", 17, AFER 10, p.76; See also Vatican II: *Nostra Aetate*, 5 AAS 58(1966) 744: *Ad Gentes*, 15.AAS 58(1966) 964; *Gaudium et spes*, 29, AAS 58(1966) 1049; *Populorum Progressio*, 62-63, AAS 59 (1967) 287-288.

person²⁹². Jesus emphasised this fact when he said “One who does not gather with him scatters”,²⁹³.

Indeed the challenge which tribalism poses for the African or Nigerian society today compares well with that posed to the early Christians by the Gentile question. This is while the Church’s ministry and evangelization in Nigeria and indeed in Africa faces a great challenge. A challenge that must be beyond tribal affinity or sentiments.

But human beings are redeemable. And redeemed human beings begin to do at least some things differently. When they do things differently, they change their usage of the cultural forms, patterns, and processes at their disposal²⁹⁴. It follows therefore that it is the use of the cultural structures that is changed, not usually the structures themselves. Redeemed persons live pretty much according to the same patterns and processes as before they became Christians. But now they use them with a new allegiance, for the sake of a new master.

The vice of tribalism should be recognized by all pastors and evangelizers as evil that needs to be salvaged in our urban cities. If the Church is to make its presence felt in this area in our African cities today, the goal should be for the salvation of the town and this really means underlining the humanity of cities and enhancing the positive human and community values inherent in tribalism or ethnicity. However, the Church in Nigeria and indeed Africa must sanitize her own house before she can effectively minister in this realm. In other words, “denominationalism or sectarianism” towards other Christians must be done away with if the Church’s cry against tribalism is to hold water. All Christian communities should come together in establishing the reign of God in the cultural milieu of Nigerians and Africans. These are the values according to Paul’s letter to the Colossians that enable human beings to transcend the human condition and to live the true life that is “hidden with Christ in God”,²⁹⁵.

2.5.4 The Trade Unions

The third group of associations was the trade unions which came into being largely for economic bargaining. For most part, modern urban centres grew up as vital commercial, mining, and communication points which had openings for the employment of skilled and

²⁹² Eph. 2:11-22; John 11:52; 2nd Cor. 5:19.

²⁹³ Matt. 12:30; Luke 11:23.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Kraft, C.H., *Op. cit.* p.114.

²⁹⁵ Colossians 3:3.

unskilled workers. In these towns, as earlier mentioned, there soon came to be concentrations of people who earned their living mainly by means of salaried or wage employment. These men, especially those at the lowest rungs of the labour ladder, have often been referred to rather inappropriately by Marxist-oriented analysts as proletarians²⁹⁶. Apart from those who were bound by the wage nexus to the big employers; i.e. the colonial government, the commercial and mining firms, the missions, etc. there were also the self-employed artisans who supplied certain of the needs of the urban population.

The life of these urban dwellers was tied to the vagaries of the world economy and market whose structure and behaviour they did not understand. To protect themselves in this unfamiliar economic world, those in wage or salaried employment formed trade unions for the purpose of effective negotiation with their employers for higher pay and better conditions of work. The self-employed craftsmen also formed crafts guilds which helped to fix prices, standards, conditions of apprenticeships, etc.

The trade unions and craft guilds, like the ethnic unions also functioned at times as friendly societies, helping members in difficulty with money and advice, providing fitting funerals, educational facilities, scholarships, and occasional feasts²⁹⁷.

Kilson has shown that by 1937, there were all kinds of tradesmen's and worker's organizations in Nigeria, Sierra-Leone, Kenya and elsewhere. Other studies such as Kimble's in Ghana, Yesufu's and Ananaba's in Nigeria, Thompson and Adolff's in French Equatorial Africa and Bates' in Zambia clearly show that the golden age of these organizations did not arrive until after the Second World War²⁹⁸.

The reasons for this were many. Hodgkin contends that these associations depended to some extent on the spread of education, and the impact of this and of urbanism took time to manifest. Outside the coastal areas of West Africa, the Maghreb, Egypt and Kenya, this

²⁹⁶ Afigbo, A.E., *Op. cit.* p.148.

²⁹⁷ This aspect was observed during the field work with some trade unions like the drivers union and the mechanics union. We witnessed two "freedom" ceremonies of their apprentices and a funeral ceremony of a relation of one of the drivers' union president's relation at Ado-Ekiti in Dec. 1994.

²⁹⁸ Kilson, M., *African Urban Kinsman: The Ga of Central Accra*, London. Hurst & Co. Pub. Ltd. 1974, p.119.

generally took more than three decades. While in South Africa where the conditions were ideal owing to an early industrial and communications revolution, the growing harshness of Boer nationalism stifled African initiative. The rise of these associations also depended to some extent on the development of a capitalist economy, but colonial Africa is said to have had only "a rudimentary capitalist economy"²⁹⁹.

The colonial period therefore marked a crucial period in the evolution of modern African society. This period witnessed the penetration of traditional Africa by the revolutionary forces of Western education, Western Christianity, Western commerce, a new and radical urbanism. Under the impact of these forces, African society did not wither away, but made a number of important adjustments that continue to the post-independent period which gave birth among other things to the new elite and the voluntary associations.

These subsequently became largely responsible for bringing about the dismantling of the colonial political structure through independence in the continent, but at the same time gave birth to so many abuses, as a result of the lack of a management culture on the part of the political nationalists, whose aim was and is to empty the different nations' treasuries³⁰⁰.

The impact of the trade unions is well pronounced even today in many of the African countries. For example, in Nigeria, there have been many industrial strikes on the part of various trade unions as a result of not coming to agreements with their various governmental employers. As already mentioned, we noticed this incidence conspicuously during the first month of our research in Nigeria.

We observed that when these unions have their meetings, most especially the artisans unions, their various workshops are locked up until after their meeting. When passengers

²⁹⁹ Ibid. p.119.

³⁰⁰ This aspect has affected all sectors of governmental life in almost all the African countries. The problem of leadership continues to be the main stumbling block to the progress in the continent of Africa. There have continued to be incessant military interventions in African Politics since their independence from colonial powers. Military governments in Africa have often been characterized by excessive, wasteful and reckless spending. Many have ruined their nation's economy through excessive military budgets.

board a taxi cab or a public transporter, the tariff is often displayed for the passengers, and the drivers union have strict rules and sanctions guiding whosoever flouts any of the rules.

2.5.5 Effect on Family Structures

It is pertinent to reiterate the fact that family life is a mixture of consensus, competition, and conflict. If there is no consensus, or too little, the members usually disperse, as with marital breakdown and young people leaving home as soon as they are able to survive on their own. As seen through the thesis so far and from the field survey, relationships within the family are strongly affected by the relative power and influence of members. The theory of Mair³⁰¹ in 1969, that African families tend to be highly authoritarian, and that male elders expect that their decisions will be accepted without question is still very much in vogue among many Yoruba homes, and in the extended family system. One of our informants did not hide this fact in his response to the question of adjustments in today's family; he said: "my wife needs to be more co-operative"; another said "my wife is influenced by the choice of discipline she had seen in me and my family". These responses further generated other sensitive issues on marital faithfulness when we asked some of the informants if their wives would accept children born by mistake outside wedlock? Almost sixty percent of them responded to the question in this way: "A child by me by "mistake" cannot be rejected by my wife". Situations like this often complicate relationships in urban living, and the different pressures militating on conjugal and parent/child relationships. We need to ask the question then, to what extent does living in town put pressure on conjugal and parent/child relations?

Urban living conditions and the nature of its employment cause some differences. Family members are more likely to be spatially separated, either with some living in town and others in the village or living in more than one house because there is not enough space for them to live together. Members of the extended family who might prefer to live near each other are frequently separated. Changes in relationships stem from less-frequent contact, but also from changes in roles due to wider opportunities for work and social contacts outside the family.

From our observations and interviews in the field, we propose that as places increase in size and in anonymity, the proportion of family employment decreases and the proportion of the population in wage employment increases. Family members less-often work together on a common enterprise, and work is less-often carried out at one's place of residence.

³⁰¹ Mair, L., *Op. cit.* p. 130.

Achievement qualities increase in importance, though family or lineage membership does not necessarily become less important.

Within the household, some members are not present to carry out their accustomed roles and the status of others changes. A vivid example is where the control of seniors over juniors and husbands over wives is undermined when their economic superiority is lost. This inevitably may change the attitude of people, most especially the youths, towards marriage.

Marriage and parenthood are seen by the Yoruba and almost all Africans as essential for adult participation in society. Hence, girls are encouraged to marry at reasonable age so that they will not 'miss their chance', and young men are warned not to prolong the joys of bachelorhood unnecessarily for too long; if they are self-supporting they are ready for marriage. So infertility to most Africans is seen as a curse, and the childless spend large sums seeking remedies. Nevertheless, the new wave of urbanisation through education has increased relatively the proportion of educated women who delay marriage or reject it altogether in recent years.

From interviews with some young individuals and groups, the contention is that they value their independence more than public approval, and thus see issues like marriage and traditional family life as an exploitative situation in which the balance of power and resources is largely on the male side.

A vivid example of these observations manifested itself at a "one day" seminar organized for the Catholic Youth association of Regina Mundi Parish Mushin Lagos. The seminar theme was centred on marriage, family and youth preparation. Some of the questions asked by participants were the sort of questions at which a traditional Yoruba person or even the traditional core Catholic person would frown. But their questions reflect the wave of thoughts in modern Yoruba society. Some of the questions asked were:

"Does the Church accept being single, that is, not being married nor going for priesthood?"; "Does test-tube baby production defy God's plan for reproduction?"; "Which is wrong: (a) Becoming pregnant before marriage? or (b) Having sexual intercourse before marriage?"; "Does the Church accept the use of contraception?"; "Does my not having sex have anything to do with my small stature?"³⁰².

³⁰² These are summaries of the questions asked. Most of the questions were secretly-written and passed on to the seminar organizers who then turned them out to the guest speakers for answers.

In all intent, these questions were posed by these youths for clarification and guidance but to the traditional Yoruba person or the Catholic person sex education is a 'no-go area'; it still remains a taboo that must not be discussed publicly. So the Western free culture is seen to exert influence through media education on the youths in this direction. This actually has its effect on the response we got from informants on sex education. One of our informants said:

"Sex should be discussed thoroughly today with the young ones and is for procreation alone. The sanctity of sex should be stressed at all times. This is the traditional view of sex and its value"³⁰³.

Another of our informants had this to say:

"No starvation, you should be close, regular mating, eating together and general understanding. And try to educate your children on the value of sex as a loving relationship"³⁰⁴.

However, some of our informants would not succumb to the idea of sex education being discussed openly with the young ones. An informant said:

"Civilisation and destruction goes together (*Olaju ati Iparun*). We should teach them about what God wants and of our valued traditional practices. Lack of moral education, and the rubbish called sex-education should be discouraged. Undue exposure and copying of ideas of the whites (*oyinbo*) is not part of our tradition and should be discouraged"³⁰⁵.

Another of the informants believes that sex education should have a unique place in marriage. According to him:

"Sex is the most important aspect between man and wife, sex should not be denied, they should be very free with one another. Sex is equally dangerous if

³⁰³ Tape-recorded interview with Mr. Adebayo, a civil servant, (aged 45yrs).

³⁰⁴ Recorded interview with Pastor Bankole, a Seventh-Day Adventist Minister at Ilorin who hails from Oke-Ila, Ifedayo Local Government of Osun State.

³⁰⁵ Tape-recorded interview on sex education with Mr. Sholaja, H.A., an informant and an educationalist.

it is misunderstood. Illness or misunderstanding should not hinder sex. Some people go for polygamy because of denied sex by their partner”³⁰⁶.

Some of our informants still take some traditional views about sex. Mr. Adegbenro says:

“In our times there were no birth control/aids campaign. Parents abstain until the child is weaned. Birth control/family planning is a modern phenomenon. No pre-marital cohabitation. There was no infidelity as those reported in the cities”³⁰⁷.

In today’s parlance sex education has no serious meaning to a lot of the elitist society. It is becoming a conventional practice in some of our cities to see women folk who have gone to the extent of exerting more control over boy-friends than they would have over a husband, and since they can satisfy their desire for a child outside of marriage, they may be willing to risk family complaints³⁰⁸.

One of our informants, a woman who believes it is normal to be single and be free to live your life with any man of your choice without planning to go into any serious relationship, had this to say:

“I do not believe that I should be subjected to the wills and caprices of any man. I want to live my life as a single lady but to have fun with any man I want and even have children not in wedlock. I can not marry because I do not believe in marriage. I have my job and I won’t allow any man to boss me around the house”³⁰⁹.

Discussion of the changes in women’s occupational and familial roles that have resulted from overall changes in the economic, political, and demographic patterns in Yoruba

³⁰⁶ Tape-recorded interview with Harrison Kola, an informant and retired civil servant. Lives in Ikorodu-Lagos.

³⁰⁷ Response from Mr. Adegbenro, an informant and a local court magistrate.

³⁰⁸ A consensus response at a day seminar on the theme "Marriage, Sex and the Youth" organized for the Youths group of Regina Mundi Catholic Parish, Mushin, Lagos, March 18th. 1995.

³⁰⁹ Edith, a banker and an informant.

cities must be analysed in order to understand the variations in domestic structures and in patterns of domestic behaviour evident in Africa today. There are three important points roles from the field survey that shed light on the nature and direction of changes in women's domestic and occupational that need to be noted.

(i) Females are being employed in increasing numbers in salaried occupations that are much more disruptive of established domestic patterns. To cite one example: traditionally the first two or three years of a Yoruba child's life was spent in very close proximity to its mother. Yoruba women normally took their young children with them on their backs to the market, to the places where they processed foodstuffs, and to their craft worksites. Today most women traders maintain the tradition of taking their young children with them to the market; however, women in salaried positions in the "modern" business or governmental sector of the society must make arrangements for the care of their infants in their homes or elsewhere.

(ii) Traditional compound-based living patterns are being undermined by the increasing migration of men and women to cities within their countries of origin and to urban and rural areas in other countries where economic opportunities are available. Most of the living pattern of houses observed during the field work were two-to-three bedroom flats with every occupant to their own apartments. Most of the buildings are so constructed in such a way that there is no room for neighbourhood interaction. A high percentage of men and their wives live in modern derivatives of compounds (which are essentially large rooming houses), wherein reside persons from different lineages, different towns, and, in many cases, different ethnic groups.

Niara Sudarkasa in her research with Yoruba women has cited instances particularly where the migrants live outside their regions or countries of origins, husbands with more than one wife find rooms for their spouses in a number of different compounds³¹⁰. The situation is more pronounced today as we observed during the field work. Another new dimension added to the residence pattern is the case where a single marriageable woman decides to keep a house of her own and bring in a man-friend of her choice. In that case she is not attached legally in marriage to the man.

³¹⁰ Sudarkasa, Niara, "Commercial Migration in West Africa, with special reference to the Yoruba in Ghana" in N. Sudarkasa, ed., Migrants and Strangers in Africa. African Urban Notes, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Winter 1974-75.

These changes in patterns of domicile, along with other such changes also present, are having far-reaching implications for husband-wife relationships, co-wife relationships, child-rearing patterns, and relationships of spouses to their wider kin networks.

(iii) More and more, young females and males are being exposed to Westernized education, Western values and life styles as communicated through the media, and Western commercial and academic propaganda which tends to identify "modernization" with Westernization. This exposure, which is buttressed by the fact that in many places Westernization is perceived to be the primary path to social mobility, is changing the very nature of what are considered to be suitable occupations, and is undermining the traditional value placed upon maintaining lineage and extended family ties which were the traditional bases of personal identity and social security.

2.6 Missionary Activities

Christianity and European trading activities were not new to the coastal areas of the Yoruba in the 19th century. From the late 15th century through to the 18th, various European traders - the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, the Spaniards and the Swedes - had organized activities with the coastal peoples and those of the immediate hinterland to collect slaves and other products like ivory in exchange for their own goods.

It is pertinent to repeat a major point here that the Yoruba experience of Christianity is one that has been acquired in the wider context of colonialism, nationalism, nation building, industrialisation and underdevelopment, and this fact must make that experience and the theological perspectives born of it of very great significance for Christian Churches beyond the frontiers of Nigeria and the African continent as a whole. Not only are some of the 'crucial points of expansion, vigour and innovation' in the Christian Church to be found in Nigeria and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa but also, it might be argued, is much of the experience necessary to deal with some of the most relevant contemporary issues which are not only of concern to African Christians in Africa, but are of worldwide dimensions³¹¹.

Having noted this fact, in this part, we shall content ourselves with the successful efforts of the missionaries in the area under consideration commencing from 1842 at Badagry.

³¹¹ R. Gray, "Christianity and Religious Change in Africa", in *African Affairs*, 77(306), January 1978: p.89ff.

As it has been noted, by 1851, Lagos and Abeokuta had a noticeable presence of white missionaries and returners as well as Creoles. By 1853, Anna Hinderer was well positioned at Ibadan³¹².

The activities of the missionaries were prominent in Abeokuta, Lagos and in subsequent years they had success in the hinterland. Between 1840-1870, there was keen competition between various missionaries but the most prominent with a far outreach was the Church Missionary Society (CMS) led by indigenous workers like Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a returner freed slave of Yoruba descent educated at Fourah-Bay College, Sierra Leone and trained in Britain. He advanced the course of Christianity and translated the Bible into Yoruba language. The significance of the Yoruba version of the Bible according to Andrew Walls, has not always been observed. It was not the first translation into an African language; but, in-so-far as Crowther was the leading influence in its production, it was the first by a native speaker.

Early missionary translations naturally relied heavily on native speakers as informants and guides; but in no earlier case was a native speaker able to judge and act on an equal footing with the European³¹³.

From his mission home in Badagry he went up to Lokoja and travelling by the Niger, he established missions at Asaba, Agbor and other locations. The success rate was due to his being an indigene and his education was used as tool of evangelisation.

The Roman Catholic Faith started taking roots as from 1863 when the first Mass was celebrated in Lagos by Fr. Borghero³¹⁴. He came in from Topo, a close annex of Badagry. Thus from there the spread of the Church commenced gradually into Ijebu territory, Ibadan, Ekitiland, Oyo and Ilorin. Though there were heavy casualties, the activities were sustained by a steady flow of white Priests, mostly from the Society of African Missions of Irish province, and only as from the 20th century did the indigenous people enter the clergy.

³¹² Akinlotan, J.Y., Op. cit. p.22.

³¹³ Andrew F., Walls "Samuel Ajayi Crowther 1807-1891, Foremost African Christian of the Nineteenth Century" in Gerald H. Anderson eds., Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement, Orbis: Maryknoll, New York, 1994, p.135.

³¹⁴ A.S.C.P.F. Acta Vol.232. F. BORGHERO, Lettera al cardinal Prefetto di P.F., Whydah 26/4/1886, ff.296-297.

There were catechists and teachers of the mission schools to sustain the pace of growth and in most circumstances reverend fathers were invited by some communities to build the Church in their towns³¹⁵. The S.M.A. Fathers were particularly credited as being in the forefront of the propagation of Catholic Faith in Yorubaland³¹⁶. Other religious orders joined later.

The Baptists came in the 1840's through Badagry and Methodists in 1870's through Lagos. These did not seem to spread in the hinterland until much later³¹⁷.

The traditionally inclined Christians commenced activities in 1920's and these led to the birth of churches like United Native African Churches, the African Church led by Rev. S. A. Coker, the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches established about seventy years ago³¹⁸.

2.6.1 Missionary Effects on Traditional Marriage Custom

It is pertinent to mention here again that Christianity grew up within a predominantly monogamous world. In the early period, the Jews practised polygamy to some extent. This was allowed by Mosaic law and was accepted without condemnation in any of their writings. The polygamous marriages of Jacob, David and Solomon were not condemned. Nevertheless, they were little imitated by the rest of the Jews³¹⁹.

The Jewish ideal of marriage was becoming more and more clearly a monogamous one, a true covenant relationship: Your wife is 'your partner and your wife by covenant' (Mal. 2:14). Thus with this kind of view in mind, there was really no room for polygamous marriage³²⁰. Yet polygamy was not outlawed among orthodox Jews, for many centuries

³¹⁵ Cf. Oguntuyi, A., Fr., History of the Catholic Church in the Ondo Diocese, Ibadan: Claverianum Press, 1970, pp.17-22.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Cf. Ajayi, J.F.A., Christian Missions in Nigeria, Op. cit. pp.255ff.

³¹⁸ Cf. Peel, J.D.Y., Aladura, London: Oxford Press, 1968.

³¹⁹ Abe, G.O., "The Jewish and Yoruba Social Institution of Marriage: A Comparative Study" in Orita-Journal of Religious Studies, XXI/ 1st June 1989, p.4.

³²⁰ Hastings, A., Christian Marriage in Africa, Op. cit. p.6.

afterwards it continued to be entered into by a few, chiefly in cases of the levirate³²¹, and prolonged childlessness³²².

The teachings of Jesus, clearly accepted the monogamous ideal of post-exilic Israel. Jesus was silent about polygamy, he only condemned divorce. Yet his teaching does presuppose that marriage is monogamous: it would hardly be true that a man who divorces his wife and marries another would be guilty precisely of adultery (Mk.10:11) if he had the right to marry another even without divorcing the first. Jesus' marriage teaching was based upon Gn.2:24, "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins his wife and they become one body".

Paul's teaching on marriage also presupposes monogamous unions, e.g. 1st Cor. 7:4, but there is no explicit treatment of the question: no discussion of what a man with two wives should do if he wants to become a Christian. The only indication is in 1st Tim.3:2 and in Titus 1:6, where the writer referred to the position taken in the Church; elders must not have married more than once. It is possible that his intention was to rule out the appointment of a polygamist as elder.

The Catholic missionaries brought with them policies about marriage which they would have taken from the theological and canonical manuals of the time. Christianity first spread in parts of the world in which, though there were polygamous practices, it was not a serious problem. Monogamy was so much a part of the culture in which the Church took root that the Church's attitude to it was largely influenced by the culture³²³.

³²¹ Levirate Marriage: the law which obliged a brother to marry the widow of his deceased brother if the brother died without a male issue. The nature of this obligation is obscure in the O.T. In Gn. 28, Judah is obliged to give Tamar the widow of Er to Er's brother Onan. Onan's refusal to fulfill his duty resulted in his death. See also Dt. 25:5-10. The purpose of the law here is to raise up seed for the deceased brother so that his name is not blotted out of Israel.

³²² Lowry, S., "The Extent of Jewish Polygamy in Talmudic Times", in Journal of Jewish Studies, (1985), pp.115-138.

³²³ Shayo, C.K., Marriage among the Chagga of Kilimanjaro: Towards the Problems of Indissolubility, Rome, Tipografica "Leberit", 1982, p.22.

For the Roman Catholic missionaries, the application of the norms guiding polygamy became rigid among the Yoruba Catholics as a carry-over of the 16th century evangelization techniques to the Americans, Asians and among the ex-African slaves in Central America. At this time the need was felt to stabilize the mission practice in following terms. The terms were a follow-up from Gregory XIII's decree, "*Constitution Populis*" and cover all the following:

i) That traditional or customary marriage was as such valid marriage; the presumption is in favour of validity; but only for the first union, natural marriages being held to be essentially monogamous.

ii) The Pauline privilege of 1st Cor 7:15, was accepted: that a valid natural marriage could be dissolved on occasion, when one partner was being baptised, and there was a moral or physical impossibility of continuing to live together³²⁴.

iii) Firmly rejecting polygamy, it only allowed a man to be baptised who had put aside all wives but one, nor could the additional wives of an unbaptised man be baptised.

iv) The polygamous man was free to choose which wife to keep so long as she, in her turn was willing to be baptised with him. This was more than the 'Pauline Privilege' allowed and came in contrast to be known as the 'Petrine Privilege'³²⁵.

v) Apart from emergencies, the marriage of two already baptised persons was only valid if celebrated before a priest and two witnesses. This was based on the decree TAMETSI of the council of Trent. This decree recognized in principle that marriage of Christians did not need an ecclesiastical or canonical form. Conscious of future evil, the decree laid down that in order to avoid the evil of clandestine marriage for the future, marriage between two baptised people not solemnized before a priest would be invalid³²⁶. Hastings concluded:

³²⁴ Gregory XIII, "*Constitution Populis*", 25th Jan. 1585 in *Collectanea S.C. de Propaganda Fide*, Vol.I p.256.

³²⁵ *Constitution Romani Pontificis* of Pius V, (1571). This 'Petrine Privilege' - Dispensation from the law of indissolubility - by which the Supreme Pontiff has the privilege as the Vicar of Christ to dispense or annul a marriage.

³²⁶ Council of Trent, twenty-fourth session, Canon 11, of 1563; see also Catechism of the Council of Trent, 11, VIII, 19.

“Despite the rather complicated rules about the necessity of local promulgation, before the decree could be applied, Catholic Missionaries in Africa appear simply to have taken the rule of TAMETSI for granted”³²⁷.

However, marriage within Yoruba traditional society has always been a community affair. Marriage was not only an alliance, a bond, or covenant between two individuals, a man and a woman, but also an alliance between two family groups or kindred communities. For the Yoruba, the fiancé and fiancée never become engaged themselves. There might be some introduction ceremony of the two. In the process of courtship and mate selection, the larger society is interested in the result. It is not merely the affair of the man and the woman. Always the two families of the marrying couple are thereby linked. The father of the bride and his family presides at all customary marriage ceremonies with the groom's family present. Therefore the question of clandestine marriage of the Western Church that called for contracting a marriage before a legitimate pastor has no bearing whatsoever with the Yoruba culture and the law remains out of place for the Yoruba and indeed the African Church as they have never contracted marriages secretly. It is the families of the two that are eventually engaged, confirmed by oaths and accompanied with gifts. This marks the decisive beginning of the union of the two families³²⁸.

Another area of incongruity in the Western Church decree on the traditional Yoruba marriage practices is the question of virginity. Virginity of a bride in Yoruba marriage was a joy to her husband and pride to her family as we shall see later in the thesis. It was a sign of a proper home training and an embodiment of high moral standard in the local community. It was a cherished pride to the women folk. An abuse of it was a blow to the dignity of women.

But today it is not uncommon to see a young bride walking majestically through the isle of the Church with a protruding stomach, sometimes more than six-months pregnant before marriage. This was observed during the field work. Often times the pregnant brides are seen dressed in white bridal garments and veil as a sign of purity and innocence. Many of these pregnant brides defend their actions by saying that their fiancés would not go for Church weddings unless they first become pregnant. Being pregnant according to them is a lesser evil. According to one of our informants:

³²⁷ Hastings, A., *Op. cit.* p.10.

³²⁸ Cf. Abe, G.O., *Op. cit.* p.8.

“Pre-marital pregnancy for me is a sign of blessing. It is important to be pregnant before wedding now. It stabilises one’s marriage because the Church law forbids divorce”³²⁹.

The purpose of Yoruba marriage as we shall see later is procreation - the child who will continue the line of life. The question of the ‘child’ continues to re-occur in every aspect of Yoruba life. Thus, the Yorubas try to find a middle way out of this problem, that is, to protect their cultural belief and at the same time remain in the Church to practice their faith. In the field- survey interviews we asked the question: “If your son is proposing to get married, will you encourage him to impregnate his bride before going for a Church wedding? The responses to this question varied; ten out of twelve of them would prefer their Catholic children to be sure of the productive power of their brides before they take the irreversible step to the altar. In other words, the brides should be pregnant or even have children before they decide to wed. When further pressed for their reason, their answer points to the fact that Catholic doctrine of marriage forbids divorce. The other two practising Catholics agreed that impregnating a girl before marriage is a sin. “Though a sin, it is a lesser sin than divorce”³³⁰.

This whole problem has come to stay as an embarrassment to the Yoruba traditional norms of marriage because of the invasion, the presence and message of Christianity into the Yoruba culture.

The second major effect of Christian enterprise on the Yoruba life on marriage is the parental consent. In the traditional Yoruba society, family consent was by far the most fundamental of all the other requirements in marriage. Without it, bride-price could not properly be paid, since any such payment must be made to the family and not to the bride herself. Obviously, the formal giving away of a bride could only be properly done by or with the approval of her family. Thus the family takes the decision and makes arrangements for the marriage. It is a marriage between two families while the two people concerned are rarely consulted. Thus a marriage may not take place if the family consent is lacking. While it cannot be denied that things have changed and young people are already asserting their rights about whom to marry, nevertheless, family approval is needed before such marriages can take place. One of our informants response to today’s marriage arrangement says:

³²⁹ Mrs. Aderibigbe, an informant from Kajola Oyo state.

³³⁰ Aderonke and Onaolapo, the two informant’s response to the question of pregnancy before marriage.

“Idana, a process that spans over three months, now there are anomalies, relatives often have issues for one another because they refused to investigate their backgrounds”³³¹.

William Bascom *et al.*, lend their weight to this arrangement today when they opined:

“Young people of both sexes exhibit an increasing tendency to initiate courtship and marriage without consulting their parents. This is a trend deplored by the older parents and grandparents, but the absence of sanctions against it indicates gradual acceptance of the pattern....family approval is nevertheless desirable, and it is unlikely that a proposed marriage would be pursued if bitterly opposed by the family”³³².

Regrettably, this idea has been stamped out by the invasion of both Western culture and Christianity. Pius XI, in his *Casti Connubii* stated:

“For each individual marriage, in as much as it is a conjugal union of a particular man and woman, arises only from the free consent of each of the spouses, and this free act of the will, by which each party hands over and accepts those rights proper to the state of marriage, is so necessary to constitute true marriage that it cannot be supplied by any human power”³³³.

And the charter of the rights of the family takes this further in article 2A, where it is stated:

“With due respect for the traditional role of the families in certain cultures in guiding the decision of their children, all pressure which would impede the choice of a specific person as spouse is to be avoided”³³⁴.

³³¹ Mrs. Afusatu Aderibigbe from Oyo. The woman mainly compared/contrasted the existing practice with the old. Tape-recorded interview.

³³² Bascom, W.R., & Herslovits, H.J., Continuity and Change in African Culture, Chicago: The University Press, 1965, p.191.

³³³ Cf AAS 22(1930), pp.543-545.

³³⁴ Charter of the Rights of the Family: Presented by the Holy See to all Persons, Institutions and Authorities concerned with the Mission of the Family in Today's World, 22nd Oct. 1983, Vat. Polyglot Press, Art, 2a, p.8.

We do not insist that parents choose partners for their sons or daughters as in the past, but we believe that family consent is still vital for a successful marriage in Yoruba culture, for it guarantees support in time of adversity and that people's culture and practices should equally be respected.

2.7 Islamic Impacts

The experience of the Yoruba became varied through contacts with other cultures.

Islam made an incursion into Yorubaland peacefully with trickles spreading as far as Oyo. This was through trade and contacts with the northern neighbours, namely the Nupe and Baruba as well as the Hausa traders, with whom they exchanged *kolanut* for commodities of the trans-sahara trade. The religion was further spread through the Jihad ('Holy War' as it is called by the Moslems) at a later period.

The dictates of Islam had similarities with certain aspects of Yoruba traditions as Camara Laye observed: "we find the religion inferior, the Islam married to animism and the animist practices of the Savannah forest and jungle tribes"³³⁵.

One of the decisive factors which favoured the early spread of Islam among the Yoruba was its approval of polygamy, as against Christianity which was officially very rigid on monogamy³³⁶. The Nigerian Obas, Obis, Emirs, and other traditional Chiefs were customarily polygamous. During the emergence of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, the masses were converted mostly through their local heads³³⁷. The failure of the early missionaries to realise that monogamy was not the Nigerian philosophy of life at the time earned them much set-back.

Islam as a religion from the Middle-East favoured polygamy. Their religious tenets allowed four wives but that they must be taken care of adequately and loved equally. With this, Islam made easy in-roads into Yorubaland and thus became a highly favoured religion of the people.

³³⁵ Camara Laye, *The Guardian of the Word*, Op. cit. p.9.

³³⁶ Ajayi, J.F.A., Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite, London: Longmans, 1969, p.103ff.; See also Adewale, S.A., "Ifa and the Spread of Islam in Egbaland", Seminar Paper, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 1981, p.14.

³³⁷ Abe, G.O., Op. cit. p.8.

However, there is more to the acceptance of polygamy by Islam than what the missionaries thought as moral laxity. The acceptance of polygamy by Islam implied the acceptance of the communal way of life of the Yoruba, and it was as a unit that Muslim missionaries sought to convert the different communities: to convert the rulers and, through them, by a new law and a new system of justice, make the people progressively Muslim³³⁸.

Christian missionaries from an individualistic society, where whatever folk-culture that had survived the Reformation and 17th century Puritanism had been virtually destroyed by the Industrial Revolution and the new puritanism of the Evangelical Revival, found life in the family compounds at best incomprehensible, at worst the devil's own institution. Concerned as they were not only to destroy paganism but also to reform the existing social structure in Africa, they were bound, sooner or later, to attack polygamy³³⁹.

The failure of the missionaries to regard the practice of polygamy as a social evil which could be progressively reformed, and as they declared it a direct violation of the laws of God, which had to be rejected by the faithful *ab initio*. By this decision according to Ajayi, they abandoned the idea of leading the whole community as a unit gradually towards Christianity³⁴⁰. The outward sign of his inward conviction that came to be demanded of the new convert was not so much the casting away of idols as his total rejection of life in the family compound symbolized by his adoption of monogamy. Because Islam accepted all these African values of the time, it had the upper hand over Christianity and remained a big force in vogue within the Yoruba traditional society and indeed in Nigeria.

2.8 Conclusion

We have so far scanned through historical details of the Yoruba nation before and after their contact with other cultures, namely: Western cultures and their values.

For the traditional Yoruba nation, factors of stability are readily found in the extended family practice which keeps the family together as a unit. This was no longer to be so with the cultural contact and values of the British and their European allies. With Yoruba and indeed African urbanisation and industrialization, a new pattern in family relationships is emerging

³³⁸ Ajayi, J.F.A., Op. cit. p.107.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

whereby a lot of Yoruba societies have become heterogenous rather than the pre-colonial traditional homogenous communities.

If the Church is therefore to be relevant in Yorubaland and indeed Nigeria today, she must see her evangelization as that of contributing richly to many phases of people's life. A vital way forward may be in formulating urban evangelism that would take on board the new family organization patterns emerging in most of our post-independent urban cities and towns. This evangelization should be seen as a substitute for family cohesion that is needed to cater for various Christian migrants today as the Church is a community of faithful.

As far back as 1959, an official Church study group in Liberia in a communiqué titled: "Changing Liberia, A Challenge to the Christian" declares that in the growing urban problem there is a challenge to the traditional conception of Christian missions:

"The missions have contributed richly to many phases of Liberian life. However, the work of missions is at least evident in urban and industrial areas. It is indeed odd that where there is greatest concentration of population there is also the least concentration of missionary effort"³⁴¹.

To probe into how relevant this communiqué is to the Church in Africa today and especially Nigeria, will require a theological undertaking but in a very precise and perhaps somewhat unusual sense.

Rapid social change affects every aspect of the life of the Church in Nigeria, and at each point calls for new forms of life and witness. The pastoral, evangelistic, liturgical and prophetic offices of the Church are deeply affected. So is the service which the Church renders to the community. The spiritual problems of the changing culture, in which the impact of urbanisation, of science and technology and the promise of progress are involved, place the Church in a milieu which calls forth new expressions of its great functions. Does not the pastor need to speak a word amid these situations which is different from that required in previous times? And is not the same true of the evangelist?

As orthopraxies of the Church, missionary activity in the urban setting is called on to carry ahead the operative presence of God, accepted in an act of faith, as the actuation of the plan of salvation that guides divine intervention in history³⁴². If the Church is to make its

³⁴¹ Change Liberia, A Challenge to the Christian, 1959, pp.84-85.

³⁴² Tonna, B., Gospel for the Cities, New York: Orbis Books, 1985.

presence felt in African cities today, the goal should be for the salvation of the town and this really means underlining the humanity of cities and enhancing the positive human values of urban life. These are the values according to Paul's letter to the Colossians that enable human beings to transcend human conditions and to live the true life that is 'hidden with Christ in God'³⁴³. This means that urban mission should take a renewed form, whereby the typical Mission Church should be reverted back to the city, its pastor a trained man, and its evangelization meeting up with urban demands.

The consensus opinion that the city is evil as seen from the interviews should be redeemed by revealing the spiritual and pastoral dimensions of the Church. The spirit of nationalism and post-independence call upon the Church, to rethink its prophetic role, and to consider new and relevant ways of service. This same spirit increases the pressure for indigenization, in liturgy as well as in other matters.

Our federal and pluralistic society inevitably causes competition among major groups, which in turn requires that the Church be ever-watchful and that in itself it be visibly a community of reconciliation³⁴⁴.

The Church should strive to help human beings to use their freedom responsibly and to see that their ego-centred network of relationships do not injure the rights and just claims of others. In the words of St. Paul, the Christian townsman's motto should be 'whatever you do, do it for the glory of God'³⁴⁵.

From our observation and interviews among the Yoruba families, we identify seven practical principles that seemed to be universal and essential values guiding traditional Yoruba life, namely: **respect, responsibility, reciprocity, restraint, reverence, reason, and reconciliation**. These values constitute timeless values that can strengthen the families we are building for the new age.

Respect is the cardinal principle that guided behaviour within Yoruba families and in the African societies at large. It not only governed the behaviour of children toward their parents, but also was extended to all elders in the family and in the community. Respect was

³⁴³ Colossians 3:3.

³⁴⁴ Cf. Christian Responsibility in an Independent Nigeria: A Report, Christian Council of Nigeria, Ibadan: Abiodun Printing Press, 1962, p.116.

³⁴⁵ 1st Cor. 10:31.

required of and toward sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles and so on throughout the kin group. Respect was shown by forms of address - in all communities older people were referred to by titles or by kinship terms such as 'uncle and aunt'. Respect was also shown by the way younger people treated their elders - through greetings, bows, and courtesies and other gestures that children learned early. Respect manifested itself in knowing when to be seen and not heard.

Responsibility: The Yorubas had to be their brothers' and sisters' keepers, and indeed Africans have been noted for their willingness to accept responsibility for their kinsfolk. Of course, in all societies, familyhood implies some acceptance or responsibility for others in the group. What is African (as opposed to Western) about the principle of responsibility is the fact that it extends to a wider range of kin than is the case where the nuclear family, comprised of a married couple and their children, is conceived as the boundary of "real" responsibility to kin. Traditionally in Yoruba and African communities, we house our cousins; feed distant relatives who come to the city looking for a job; and help take care of nieces and nephews. If African families are to survive and prosper in the 21st century, we have to continue to assume responsibility for our extended families, as well as for the close relatives with whom we live.

Reciprocity is the principle that compels us to give back to our families and communities in return for that which we receive. Among the Yoruba people, it is expected that generosity will prevail, especially among relatives, but it is also expected that good deeds will be reciprocated either in the short run or in the distant future. Sometimes obligations even may be carried from one generation to the next, but they should never be shirked. In our city communities today, we must continue to reach out, reach down, and reach back to help those less fortunate than we as a way of repaying those who assisted us.

Restraint is probably the value that is hardest to teach and accept in today's highly individualistic and materialistic society. In Yoruba cities today, "me and mine" always takes precedence over "thee and thine". Everybody wants to "do his own thing". But within traditional Yoruba families, a person had to consider the good of the group when making decisions for and about himself or herself. Restraint was manifest in so many ways - people gave their guests the best they had; a brother sacrificed his own ambitions to send another to college; marriages might be postponed to enable one of the partners to render financial help to a sister or brother. Parents and grandparents sacrificed for their children, who in turn, reciprocated the sacrifice by helping them in their old age. Such selflessness must be rekindled if we are to build strong kinship networks for the future.

Reverence: The Yorubas are traditionally spiritual people. Yorubas traditionally taught their children to revere the earth and its creator. They taught reverence for the ancestors as well as for all living things. Today, our children and indeed many parents have no time for spirituality—but regardless of one’s religion, it is important to have reverence for the God who put us here and who has brought us thus far on the way.

Reasonableness: The Yorubas wanted to be thought of as reasonable people. When a dispute broke out, elders appealed to reason, not to emotion, to settle the matter. Among the Yorubas, people did not take many disputes to the formal Government courts. They took them to family and community elders and these wise men and women took as much time as necessary to persuade the parties concerned to come to reasonable settlements. We have got to get the city people of Africa to know that they must use their reason and their intellect as much as their emotion and sentiment - in approaching the problems we face, within our families and outside.

Reconciliation: Reconciliation was a value that cannot be over-stressed in family and community life. People knew that they had to be able to forgive each other; and to reconcile their differences. The Yoruba have the practice of prostrating or kneeling before another to beg forgiveness, and it is virtually unthinkable for anyone to be so hard-hearted as to fail to reconcile himself or herself with a relative or friend, or even former adversary, when the elders and the person himself beg to have the matter put to rest. We have to draw on our heritage as a people for whom family has been the greatest source of strength and security, and move forward to reaffirm the value of kinship now and in the new age.

As we have seen the background to the Yoruba people, we can now validly proceed to deal with marriage in their traditional context. We believe that it is only through this that we can appreciate the value the Yoruba placed on their marriage.

3. CHAPTER THREE: YORUBA MARRIAGE TRADITIONS

3.1 *Preamble*

In this chapter, we examine some major aspects of Yoruba marriage traditions with regard to nature, preparations, the rites and their significance.

Today, there are variants reflective of the impact of Christianity and Western culture. Thus what obtains in cities is a slight departure from what obtains in rural areas.

Marriage is a factor in, and foundation of the family, the family is thus established in a sub-set of the extended family. But the experience of different cultures throughout history has shown the need for various societies to recognize and defend the institution of marriage and family.

So in this chapter, we will consider the nature and procedures of Yoruba traditional marriage as performed in both traditional and modern society. The factors considered in our investigation here include the traditional conception of marriage among the Yoruba, the processes involved in a traditional Yoruba marriage, the factors of monogamy and polygamy, betrothal and virginity, dowry and bride-price, marriage contract, childlessness and divorce.

Our main source of collections here are from interviews on the field, oral narration, documented data or writings on traditional marriage by previous researches, observation of marriage ceremonies and other relevant mimeographs on the subject matter.

These facts were collected around the area designated as Yorubaland³⁴⁶.

3.2 *The Traditional Concept of Marriage among the Yoruba*

Western sociologists have defined marriage as a socially acknowledged and approved sexual union between two adult individuals³⁴⁷. A marriage in Yorubaland goes beyond sexual union. The type of family organisation as has already been noted is the extended family, where "one is his brother's keeper".

The first thing to bear in mind is that marriage in Yoruba involves a social and cultural relationship that is so meaningful yet so profoundly complex³⁴⁸. It is therefore not just an

³⁴⁶ Cf. Appendix on the map of Yorubaland.

³⁴⁷ Giddens, A., *Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2nd ed., 1995, p.390.

³⁴⁸ Cf. Olajubu, O., *Iwe Asa Ibile Yoruba*, Ibadan: Longman, 1978. p.48.

affair between a man and a woman, but one that brings together many families, communities and ethnic groups³⁴⁹. In other words, marriage to the traditional Yoruba society is rather an alliance between the families of the bride and the bridegroom. It is an affair that indeed depends on such groups and communities for its success and survival³⁵⁰. What Mbiti said on the general African view of marriage is equally shared by the Yoruba that:

“This is an important African view of marriage, namely that it is not an affair between two people only but between those two people together with their families and relatives. This has grown out of the African view that a person does not exist all by himself; he exists because of the existence of other people. The philosophical formula about this says, ‘I am because we are and since we are therefore I am’³⁵¹.

This in effect means that no man is an island. Marriage to the Yoruba remains a community affair. Marriage is seen as the most important event in one’s life. Mbiti further lends weight to its importance when he says that marriage is “the focus of existence”³⁵². He goes on:

“It is the point where all members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized...Therefore marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Otherwise, he who does not participate in it is not only abnormal but underhuman”³⁵³.

Because of its importance, marriage among the traditional Yoruba society remains a stable institution which involves a number of processes. According to Niara Surdakasa, it was through ties of marriage that families as well as individuals of different lineages are drawn

³⁴⁹ Cf. Abe, G.O., *Op. cit.* p.6.

³⁵⁰ Okodua, B.A., *Coping with Irregular Marriage in the Light of the Magisterium, a Pastoral Suggestion for Yorubaland Nigeria*, Rome: Domenemici Pecheux, 1985, p.34.

³⁵¹ Mbiti, J.S. *Op. cit.* p.102.

³⁵² *Ibid.* p.113.

³⁵³ *Ibid.* p.113.

together into extended families³⁵⁴. Since it is the centre of life it embraces every aspect of man such as economic, social and religious aspect.

Even though marriage is not necessarily expected of all members of contemporary African communities, in traditional African societies, it was customary for all adults except holders of certain offices and persons with severe mental or physical disabilities to get married and have children³⁵⁵. In the unsophisticated traditional life of the Yoruba, no person remained unmarried by choice after passing about the age of thirty in the case of men and twenty-five in the case of women³⁵⁶. Consequently, the families ensure that their wards are married into the other family according to the tradition that enhances association based on sanctity, status and purity³⁵⁷. These three assure the families that the new family starts off on a good note.

In Yoruba marriage more emphasis is placed on arrangement than on love in the marriage³⁵⁸. However, according to Fadipe, as far back as about 1880 the question of seeking a partner for a young man among the Yoruba did not arise until after puberty³⁵⁹.

There is much screening for hereditary illness, for insanity, and sanctions are placed on incest rules. Of three basic things of life: birth, marriage and death, marriage is the bridge through which one passes from one world to the other. And since it is looked upon as a sort of live-wire, then if it does not fulfil the essential function of transmitting life, such a marriage outlives its usefulness and so could be dissolved.

³⁵⁴ Surdakasa, N., Op. cit. p.40.

³⁵⁵ Mbiti, J.S., Op. cit. p.98.

³⁵⁶ Cf. Fadipe, N.A., The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970, p.65.; See Abe, G.O., Op. cit. p.9.

³⁵⁷ Interview with Dr. Thomas Ilesanmi, an informant, an authority in Yoruba traditional literature and history, Ile-Ife, September 1994.

³⁵⁸ From interviews with informants: marriage in the traditional Yoruba society used to be arranged by the family of the boy when they felt he was ripe enough to get married. The family equally footed the bills incurred on the marriage arrangement.

³⁵⁹ Fadipe, N.A., Op. cit. p.70.

3.3 Process of Marriage

Marriage among the Yoruba does not point to a particular period or moment. Rather, it is a rite of passage spread over a period of time.

The process of marriage custom discussed here is basically the pattern followed by the Yoruba today. Among the educated, however, as we shall see, certain deviations from the pattern are acceptable.

A very high value and premium were placed on marriage and family life and this led to, or made it mandatory for, every marriage to be preceded by necessary and serious preparation. There were remote and immediate preparations.

3.3.1 Remote Preparation

Remote preparation consisted mainly of community training. The young man leaned on his elders as well as his peers to learn the codes of both social and marital behaviour, manliness, hard work and other human virtues³⁶⁰. The girl also leaned on her elders especially the mother, the elder sisters, the aunt as well as her age group for learning the code of social and marital behaviour³⁶¹. Because for every young man and woman marriage loomed high on the horizon and single life was not in vogue in any form in Yorubaland in those days, every early preparation for life looked towards marriage.

3.3.2 Immediate Preparation

There are three main processes to be followed before one can be regarded as married in Yorubaland. These requirements or processes are: An Early Intimation, A Formal Betrothal and The Marriage. We shall examine these processes in detail.

3.3.2.1 The Early Intimation

For the Yorubas, marriage is understood to be a life-long commitment³⁶² (though dissoluble in **Principle**) even before the advent of Christianity/Westernization, and so the

³⁶⁰ Cf. Mba, C., "African Traditional Marriage: Its Values and Contributions to Christian Marriage" in Etafo, B., & Okeke, H.O., (ed.), Marriage and the Family in Nigeria, Enugu, Nigeria: Otuson Nigeria Ltd., 1993, p.11.

³⁶¹ This is reflected in the extended value system discussed in chapter two of this thesis.

³⁶² Fr. Oguntuyi acknowledged the truth and belief of marriage stability among the Yoruba until 1916 when

choice of a marriage partner is not something that is rushed into but rather it is made after mature deliberation and careful scrutiny. Thus in the traditional set up, such a fateful and decisive choice (of a marriage partner) was considered to be beyond the competence of the young people about to be involved in such an important commitment. It was therefore the responsibility of the elders (parents or relations) to make such a choice for their children³⁶³.

In Yorubaland, it is the man that goes out to look for a wife. And so the father has the obligation of getting a wife for his son for such an act is the greatest thing a father could do for his son³⁶⁴. Since for the Yoruba, the sole reason for marriage is procreation, the father would be ashamed if the stream of life were to terminate with his son for the simple reason of not being helped to marry a wife³⁶⁵. The greatest happiness and prayer of a parent is to see and enjoy the company of his/her grandchildren. Hence, the nuptial prayers of the liturgical rite of the Christian wedding are so much appreciated by the Yoruba Christians. This is one of the reasons that prompt the parents to make early marriage negotiations for their wards. This may be early: in some cases as early as the first ten years of life when some parents decide to arrange their wards to consolidate ties³⁶⁶. This will be alien at a later stage. The betrothal and formal wedding follows at maturity.

divorce was introduced into Yorubaland by the British Government. See, Oguntuyi, A., Fr., Op. cit. p. 75.

³⁶³ Johnson, O.S., Op.cit. p.113.

³⁶⁴ This is a kind of duty owed by parents to their children because of the services they render them. The service has to do with the age-grade systems already treated in chapter two of this thesis. This is an act of loyalty to the extended family system.

³⁶⁵ Some of our informants acknowledged the fact that the cost of their marriage ceremonies were borne by their parents. While some of them even claimed that their marriages were arranged for them by their family back home.

³⁶⁶ Cf. Fadipe, N.A., Op. cit. p.65.; Arowolo, O.O., "A Re-Examination of the Relationship between Western and Koranic Education and Fertility in Nigeria", Ife Social Sciences Review, Vol.2, No.1, March 1978, p.36.

As soon as the parents of the young man come in contact with a girl whom they consider to be a suitable partner for their son, the first step is the appointment of an *Alarina* (an intermediary).

An intermediary in this case may be one of their relations or a close friend of the family. His/her duty as an intermediary is to make some secret enquiries concerning the family of the bride-to-be and the character of the girl. In order to make the right choice, there are certain moral and physical qualities which are used as the guiding principles during the secret enquiries. Fadipe lends weight to the importance of discreet inquiries as a way of ensuring not only soundness of stock (and thus to eliminate as far as possible the risk of a union which would bring shame or unhappiness upon the family) but also to guarantee the peace of members of the family³⁶⁷.

The following, among others, are the outstanding qualities which are demanded: the reputation of the girl's family; the reputation of the girl herself; blood relationship; and the fecundity of the girl.

In the area of the reputation of the girl's parents, questions are asked as to whether the parents/guardians of the girl have ever committed any serious public crime such as theft. If the *Alarina* discovers that any of the girl's parents has been indicted of any serious crimes, the plan to marry the girl is suspended immediately when the case is made known to the family of the intended suitor. Another area of inquiry is to find out whether the girl's parents have the habit of quarrelling and fighting or whether the mother is particularly respectful.

The intermediary is to establish also that the families are free from hereditary diseases like leprosy, tuberculosis, insanity and, capitally that they are not pawns nor insolent debtors. Other enquiries include whether the family is hardworking or lazy. Is the wife (the girl's mother) faithful to her husband or not? Obviously, the reasonableness for such enquiry is that children take after their parents. So much emphasis is laid on the habit of the mother whom the daughter normally takes after³⁶⁸. It is equally a gesture that every family wants to ensure

³⁶⁷ Fadipe, N.A., Op. cit. p.71.

³⁶⁸ It is a strongly-held belief among the Yoruba that a child takes after the mother since the first few years of character development is influenced by the mother who is so intimate with the child. So the Yoruba say, "a spoilt child is the product of its mother" - "Omo ti ko ba dara ti iya re ni".

that only the best gets in from outside, and that the bride's family want to ensure that their ward goes to a decent place³⁶⁹.

The second important aspect of the enquiry is the reputation of the girl herself. The marriage intermediary has to find out whether the girl is obedient to her parents, hardworking in accompanying the mother to the farm and in helping with other domestic assignments. Is she equally respectful and helpful to other people outside the family circle? Besides this, the most important area of concern during the investigation is whether the girl is intact with regards to her virginity which, in traditional society, was the most important condition for marriage and equally a place of pride for the girl's parents³⁷⁰.

The third immediate enquiry is concerned with blood relationship. In the Yoruba traditional set up, both exogamous and endogamous marriage is allowed and so a person is free to marry within or outside the kinship community. However, with regards to endogamous marriage, the choice of marriage partner is not allowed between close relatives. Therefore, it is imperative upon the marriage intermediary to scrutinize thoroughly to ensure that none of the members of the girl's family has any blood relationship with the members of the intended marriage partner. The law of consanguinity among the traditional setting takes into consideration three or four generations of nuclear families of lineal descendants. For example, people from the same extended family called *Obakan* or *Iyekan* are prohibited from contracting marriage. Any attempt to do so would be an abomination, and such couples would be mocked and scorned in the society. The reason is obviously that of ensuring sanity in the family of the intended couple as well as avoiding any sort of incest³⁷¹.

As already noted, the tacit and absolute condition for marriage validity is that the girl be fertile in order to give birth to children. This idea is clearly manifested in the famous Yoruba saying which states that: "*Iyawo Mi O Dara, Nitori Omo Ni Mo Se Fee*"; 'One does not marry a wife for beauty but for the purpose of procreation'. This does not imply that a medical report is needed to testify that the girl is fertile but rather the historical fertility of the

³⁶⁹ Pa Ajayi, an informant, (aged 65yrs), interviewed at Ile-Ife, January 1995.

³⁷⁰ Recorded interview with Pa Ajayi, an informant and a retired educationalist who is an expert on Yoruba family history.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

girl's family is a sufficient reason to presume that the girl would be fertile³⁷². Besides this, the marriage intermediary has to find out whether any member of the girl's family suffers from any hereditary disease like insanity or epilepsy³⁷³.

Having been satisfied with the background enquiries, the *alarina* reports to the parents of the young man intending to marry the girl. On completion of this assignment, a conversation fee or *idegiri lekanna* in Yoruba is paid to the girl. If the girl accepts this from the *alarina* she is prepared to meet the man in question directly.

Then the suitor's parents send a delegation along with the *alarina* to the girl's family to declare their intention. Normally the parents of the girl would demand time to think over the proposal. But before accepting it the parents of the girl would have also carried out their own discreet investigation concerning the boy's family. The emphasis during this enquiry is similar to the one made by the boy's family. The ability of the man to maintain and protect their daughter is of paramount importance to them. Usually if the parents of the girl seem to be unwilling, probably as a result of lack of adequate information on the parental background of the intended suitor, it is the duty of the *alarina* to pave the way by furnishing the girl's parents with good information concerning the background of the intending suitor.

It is to be noted that where there are conflicting choices in both cases, the *Ifa* (divination) oracle is invariably consulted and the family deity is called upon to guide their steps aright³⁷⁴. Even where the parents of the girl give their approval it should be noted that such approval is tentative for it has to be confirmed or withdrawn depending on whether they were satisfied or not during the period of courtship. This is also the position of the suitor and the family.

Meanwhile, the work of *alarina* is terminated here; hence the saying "*Bi oko ba moju aya tan, alarina a yeba*", 'when the bride and groom meet the go-between disappears'! As soon as the parents of the girl give their tentative consent to the proposal, a certain date is fixed

³⁷² This condition *sine qua non* affirms the endogamous preference of marriage among the traditional Yoruba nation.

³⁷³ Bolaji, S.L., *Yoruba Living Heritage*, Ibadan: Omoleje Pub. Coy., 1984, p.32.

³⁷⁴ Interview with Ilesanmi Thomas. Op. cit.

for *Isihun*, the formal and legal betrothal of the girl to the boy followed by the Ifa oracle. Literally, the response to a voice, or, the release of a voice respectively³⁷⁵.

3.3.2.2 *Betrothal*

The second stage in the marital process is the Betrothal which is called *Isihun* in Yoruba³⁷⁶. This is a formal consent since no girl will marry without the consent of her parents. This decision is not only made by man, it is also made by the deity through the consultation of *Ifa*. It must be noted here that, if *Ifa* predicts anything contrary, the process is terminated, or if there is any impediment discovered an intense investigation will be made prior to the day. When these are cleared there will be rejoicing and mild celebrations.

Betrothal has a special ceremony bordering on ritual in which the young man or the intending husband is presented to the family of the girl³⁷⁷. The two families are formally introduced to one another as this is the beginning of in-law interaction which involves all the members of the two families. The ceremony of betrothal is simple with both religious and social undertones. The young man's parents simply bring some drinks to the home of their son's fiancée and some cola for prayers.

The presentation of drinks and cola mentioned are symbols used with meaning. For example, the local wine (*emu*) among the Yoruba is a symbol of friendship, communion, oneness and acceptability; and it is used in many African societies in ceremonies, festivals and covenant-making³⁷⁸. The wine which the boy's parents take to those of the girl shows their friendly attitude, their willingness to establish fellowship with the other family, and their

³⁷⁵ Recorded Yoruba traditional marriage narration from Dr. Thomas Ilesanmi, an expert in Yoruba literature and history.

³⁷⁶ Ilesanmi, T.M., "Marriage in Yoruba Tradition" in The Catholic Witness, Ibadan: Claverianum Press, May 1982, pp.1-8.

³⁷⁷ Ibid. p.5.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Mbiti, J.S., Introduction to African Religion, Op. cit. p.101.

readiness to form a marriage covenant. It is equally at this stage that the father of the bride-to-be lectures both parties to be steadfast in their choice of each other³⁷⁹.

The family of the man is expected to pay a certain respect to the family of the girl individually and collectively as long as the marital relationship persists. After this formal betrothal the girl's family closes their door to new suitors since it is the practice among the Yoruba to regard the marriage as being established or initiated by the formal betrothal. This social regulation is cemented by the saying:

*"A kii mo oko omo
Ka tun male omo"*

"We cannot know the husband of a girl
And at the same time know her male friend"³⁸⁰.

The success of the marriage has thus become the responsibility not only of the girl and her husband but of the entire families. The man is also expected to visit the girl anytime he wants without been molested by the girl's family and as a mark of respect and duty, he has to occasionally visit his future in-laws with his farm-produce in recognition of his in-laws, his duty and his ability to maintain his home³⁸¹.

With the ceremony of betrothal over, a vital and complex period called courtship sets in. This period affords the couple the opportunity of seeing much of each other to find out whether they could actually live together as future husband and wife. The period of courtship may last months or years³⁸². According to Fagun:

"courtship is a period of personality exploration and a testing of the degree of compatibility between the two partners"³⁸³.

³⁷⁹ Pa Ajayi of Ile-Ife, (aged 65yrs), narrated the significance of these symbols in an interview with him. 19th November 1994.

³⁸⁰ Ilesanmi, T.M., Op. cit. p.5.

³⁸¹ Ilesanmi, T., Interview. Op. cit.

³⁸² Ilesanmi, T.M., Op. cit. p.5.

³⁸³ Fagun, M.O., "Inculturation of Marriage Among the Yoruba", A Paper presented to the Liturgical Inculturation Holding in Jos organized by the CBCN Commission for

Although the ceremony of betrothal entitled the couple to certain privileges in that they could go out together to social gatherings, yet they were bound by certain obligations. The girl, as would be expected, had to be on her best behaviour: she does much of the housework like cleaning the compound and washing the clothes of her suitor and that of his parents as well as helping the young man's mother in some work in the farm when she visits them. She is still not allowed to live in the man's house at this time until after the last rite is performed. The suitor and his family feed and buy new clothes for her³⁸⁴.

Since marriage for the Yoruba is sacred, the essential aspect of courtship is that it should be chaste. The demand for chastity is that the engaged couple are not yet married and so any sexual relationship which is peculiar to the married state is prohibited. Moreover, chastity is a prelude to true love for those who are engaged. If there is no reverence during the period of courtship there would not be any reverence later in their married life³⁸⁵. Stressing the importance of virginity in the traditional African society, Mbiti says:

"The blood of virginity is the symbol that life has been preserved, that the spring of life has not already been flowing wastefully, and that both the girl and her relatives have preserved the sanctity of human reproduction. Only marriage may shed this sacred blood, for in so doing it unlocks the door for members of the family in the loins to come forward and join both the living and the living-dead"³⁸⁶.

It is for this reason that the Yoruba prevent the betrothed girl from sharing the same room with her suitor. And the mother of the young man in particular would do everything to prevent any occasion that could bring them together in sexual union.

3.3.2.3 *The Engagement or Idana*

The formal introduction of families (*moni nmo o*) literally translated: 'know me I know you' is followed by *Idana*. At this stage the betrothal is consolidated - hence the saying:

Inculturation in the Liturgy, Oct. 12th, 1993, in Tit-Bits From The Works of Bishop M.O. Fagun, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria: Hope Paper Mills Ltd., 1995, p. 251.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ilesanmi, recorded interview, Op. cit.

³⁸⁶ Mbiti, J.S., Op. cit. p.141.

*“Okanlelugba ni oko wundia
Okansoso ori e loko gidi”*

“201 are the suitor of a virgin (girl)
only one is the authentic husband”

(The word *wundia* in Yoruba for girl also refers to their virgin status)³⁸⁷.

The *Idana* is a big but impressive ceremony that involves wining and dining, exchange of gifts and is jointly celebrated in the house of the bride. It is more often celebrated in the evening³⁸⁸.

From this day forward, the son-in-law can be invited to meet certain responsibilities or social functions at the instance of the in-laws. Sometimes the day of wedding is fixed on this day; it may be within months or in some cases years; but recently it is a matter of weeks or months, and in contemporary times wedding takes place the next day³⁸⁹. At this ceremony the father of the bride with his family presides over the occasion. The people of the bridegroom bring a variety of gifts according to their ability and generosity to the bride and the parents-in-law.

3.3.2.4 Dowry and Bride-Price

Dowry or bride-price is the prime gift which the parties in marriage receive from the other³⁹⁰. In other words, dowry or bride-price is:

³⁸⁷ This is still a common idiomatic expression among the Yoruba society today showing that of all that scramble for befriending a girl, she can only marry one of them.

³⁸⁸ This is still very much so among the modern Yoruba society. All the engagement ceremonies we observed were very impressive with much pomp and pageantry celebrated in the evenings of the Friday preceeding the Saturday's Church marriage.

³⁸⁹ In most of the weddings we observed during the field work, the Church wedding takes place the following day after the engagement or *Idana* ceremony. In most cases, the ceremony of *Idana* took place on Friday preceeding the Saturday of the white or Church wedding.

³⁹⁰ Abe, G.O., Op. cit. p.10.

“any gift or payment in money, natural produce, brass, cowries or any other kind of property whatever to a parent or guardian of a female person on account of a marriage of that person which is intended or has taken place”³⁹¹.

Among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, the bride-price is usually fixed, either in cash, kind, or both. Payment of bride-price among the Yoruba varies from place to place. Generally, a reasonable price ranging from about fifty naira and above is charged, especially in the rural areas³⁹². From interviews on the field, most of our Yoruba informants told us they paid an insignificant amount. For example, one informant told us:

“The in-laws gave me the option of paying “how much” I can afford”³⁹³.

The reason for taking bride-price among the Yoruba is tradition. Every parent wants to collect, every groom wants to pay the bride-price³⁹⁴. In the past, it was not so large³⁹⁵. Unlike some other ethnic groups, bride-price among the Yoruba cannot be said to be colossal, or a barrier to prospective bride-grooms, although the elitist marriage of the rich or educated attracts a high bride-price all over Yorubaland³⁹⁶.

³⁹¹ Section 3, Limitation of Dowry Law, Cap. 76, Law of Eastern Nigeria, 1963.

³⁹² Most of our informants agreed on variations as to the amount charged by different families according to their status in society. Some do not even take any monetary gift in form of a dowry. Abe, G.O., equally confirmed this in his cited article.

³⁹³ Simon Ojo, Ikole-Ekiti, 48yrs, 13 years traditional marriage, interviewed Feb. 1995.

³⁹⁴ Simon Ojo, an informant. Op. cit.

³⁹⁵ Abe, G.O., Op. cit. p.11.

³⁹⁶ Marriage of the elitist group in Yorubaland is referred to in today's parlance as "high-society wedding" and it is found mostly among families of the same "high-class" in Nigeria. I witnessed a few of these during the field work. The living conditions of families affect the type of marriage their offspring contract.

It is necessary to note that it is not so much the economic value of these gifts which is essential as their meaning and what they symbolize. This idea is backed up by 'A Report on Christian marriage in Africa', compiled by Adrian Hastings, where it says:

"It is the view of this report that it is as such an acceptable and valuable custom. It provides the guarantee of the sincerity of the bridegroom, a symbol of friendship to the family of the bride, and some impediment to divorce. It proves to the young bride that her marriage is something of real importance and her presence in the husband's home much valued"³⁹⁷.

Thus the institution of this practice is the most concrete symbol of the marriage covenant and security. Under no circumstances is this custom a form of 'payment', as outsiders have so often mistakenly said. Even to the missionaries who oppose dowry systems among primitives, the missionary Leenhardt writes:

"Missionaries who tried to base marriage on mutual consent alone cannot flatter themselves that their experiment has proved satisfactory. The moral basis upon which marriage between free persons is built is too subtle to serve as a legal basis. Law needs a concrete basis. The seal of security of illiterate peoples, e.g. bride-price, corresponded to the requirements of the law"³⁹⁸.

This idea is further backed up by the Nigerian Bishops in their joint pastoral letter to Catholic Christians in Nigeria at the Independence celebration in 1960. According to them:

"In itself bridewealth is not a bad thing. It can help to make a marriage more stable and the ability to collect it indicates that a man has proved himself ready for marriage"³⁹⁹.

³⁹⁷ Hastings, A., ed. Christian Marriage in Africa, London: SPECK, 1974, p.108.

³⁹⁸ Leenhardt, M., "Dowry Systems among Primitive Peoples", in Consent versus Bride-Price Dowry IRM., Vol.XIX (1930), pp. 220-230.

³⁹⁹ Joint Pastoral Letter of the Nigerian Hierarchy in The Catholic Church in an Independent Nigeria, Ibadan: Claverianum Press, October 1st. 1960, pp.17-18.

While payment of dowry (to the groom) may be found among some ethnic groups in Nigeria, it is not common among the Yoruba⁴⁰⁰. However, Fadipe is of the opinion that payment of dowry is practised in Yorubaland, though he is not specific⁴⁰¹. This claim is not certain.

And so with the bride-groom's family offerings in hand they make a formal petition from the father of the bride. The father of the bride in turn questions his daughter on her resolve and she responds accordingly. The father of the bride then turns to the bridegroom for similar questions and admonitions.

After the payment, the couple are given blessings by selected members of the party with father of the bride praying last. It is after this part of the ceremony that the handing over of the bride is done. In traditional society, the bride is handed over to the leader of the bridegroom's party who will pledge that the bride will be well looked after. This short act in itself is part of marital rites as on the wedding day the girl will be escorted by her age group and be formally received by the women of the compound. This handing-over ceremony also provides for the parents of the bride to formally accept their son-in-law and declare him to be a son, and pray for prosperity for him and his household. In some cases gifts and good wishes are further exchanged after the prayers over refreshments.

Having analysed the traditional notion of bridewealth, it should be said here that bridewealth today is perceived as a moral issue in weddings. The traditional notion of bridewealth which has now been changed into exorbitant bride-price does not only outlive its purpose but is also the cause of a lot of moral problems in the society. Attesting to this fact, in a joint pastoral letter to Catholic Christians in Nigeria at the time of Nigeria's independence, the Catholic hierarchy had this to say on the question of exorbitant bride-wealth:

"But we condemn seriously those parents and relatives who make exorbitant demands. They are endangering the happiness of their children and of other peoples' children. Because unreasonable demands are being obliged to postpone unduly their marriages. In the interval they are tempted to frequent places of ill-fame where both their spiritual and physical health's suffer. Often too, a young couple are forced to start married life in debt"⁴⁰².

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Abe, G.O., *Op. cit.* p.12.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Fadipe, N.A., *Op. cit.* p.67.

⁴⁰² *Op. cit.* p.18.

Aylward Shorter equally attests to this fact when he says:

“bridewealth at the present time is certainly subject to abuse, and the cause of a great many evils. Its original character was a process of real symbolic gift exchange, legalising a marriage, legitimizing the children of the union, identifying the bride’s family, stabilizing the marriage to a limited extent... Above all, it has the function of giving cohesion to the extended family. Today the abuse of bridewealth actually operates against the extended family, disrupting it, and serving the profit of individuals within the family at the expense of others”⁴⁰³.

In other words, ‘when bridewealth changes from being a way of committing two families to uphold the marriage and becomes a way to acquire quick wealth, the social utility of bridewealth changes. It no longer makes marriage stable and seldom guarantees absolute rights over offspring even in the customary marriages’⁴⁰⁴.

On account of high bride-prices today, many young people are frustrated. In the light of this they (the youths, especially the girls) feel compelled to resort to immoral acts like illicit sexual intercourse. Onimhawo testifies to this when he says:

“Many young people are being forcefully kept out of marriage. This invariably results in many bachelors and spinsters roaming the whole area and causing moral reprehensible acts”⁴⁰⁵.

Having given the fact of abuse of this system, it is imperative for the process of inculturation to re-appropriate the values inherent in traditional bridewealth, since culture is a living thing and it is the custom of a people that determines their culture. Although, the question of high price in bride-wealth is not creating many problems among the Yoruba ethnic groups because what the Yoruba consider most is its significance and they do not see it as a fund-raising venture, the problem may arise with ethnic exogamous marriage whereby a

⁴⁰³ Shorter, A., African Culture and Christian Church, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973, pp.171-172.

⁴⁰⁴ Male, D., & Onyango, P., The Sociology of African Family, New York: Longman Inc., 1984, p.13.

⁴⁰⁵ Onimhawo, J.A., "Consequences of Exorbitant Bride-Price" (in Etsako), in The Path Magazine, Vol.4, No.3, Benin City, 1985-1986, p.17.

Yoruba boy for example proposes to engage an Ibo lady and he has to pay a heavy bride-wealth because for them, exorbitant bride-wealth is the norm, then it may affect inter-ethnic marriages as he may not be able to afford the price. John Osom has devoted his doctoral thesis “Moral Implication of High Bride-Price in Nigeria: Annang Case Survey” on analysing the implication of high bride price among the Annang and other Eastern parts of Nigeria. According to his survey, high bride- price makes it very difficult for the youths with average income in the Eastern states of Nigeria to get married with the resultant moral problems nowadays⁴⁰⁶.

It is important to note an aspect which runs through the lives of the traditional Yoruba society, and that is their religion. On the day of the engagement, traditionally the head of the family is requested to pour a libation. A libation consists of three parts: invocation of the gods and ancestors, blessing, and curse. First of all, the God - *Olorun* who lives in the sky, who sees all that is done on earth, is invoked. Next are invoked the ancestors of the family, village or clan (depending on whether the event is a family, village or clan one). They are called upon to stand around and give protection. The blessing is for those who wish the occasion well. These well-wishers are now blessed - first the dead, then the living. Finally a curse is pronounced on those who wish the occasion evil - first the dead, then the living. Drink is poured on the ground after each invocation, blessing or curse. Libation is performed standing outside a short distance away from the assembly. Of their own accord, the Yoruba laity have today Christianised the ceremony of libation so that instead of invoking the god of the sky and of the earth, they invoke the God who made heaven and earth.

In most Yoruba ceremonial gatherings today, wine is still poured out for prayers but in a “mixed up” manner of tradition and Christianized version whereby the God of the sky - *Olorun* is prayed to and equally the spirit of the ancestors are invoked because they believed these ancestors led a good life while on earth and they are at peace in heaven⁴⁰⁷.

Decorum is the word here as each of the party members watch what they say, how they conduct themselves and after the meal the entourage departs. Serious lessons commence in both homes to prepare the two for the wedding and married life.

⁴⁰⁶ Osom, J., Moral Implication of High Bride-Price in Nigeria: Annang Case Survey, Doctoral Dissertation in Moral Theology, Rome, 1989.

⁴⁰⁷ I observed and witnessed a few occasions of such rites during the field work.

In the case of the girl (bride) basic lessons are given in protocol, household maintenance, regard for elderly women in the compound, respect for the husband and his family and her position as the most 'junior' member of the household by virtue of her wedding. It is based on these last aspects that the children she meets in the household are given dignifying appellations like - *Ibadi-aran*, *Ayiluko*, *Ologe*, *Kiiwe*, *Ojulowo-oko*, *Awoko*, *Akowe* (a name for those of school age with the advent of education, and in recent times, aunt, and sister for females and uncle for the males).

After this stage the movement of the girl is restricted. She is no longer allowed to go out alone for fear of been stolen or 'deflowered' by other interested parties who have lost out. Furthermore, much time is spent on teaching her *rara* (*Ekun iyawo*) the bridal chant and a bit of the genealogy of the husband.

Little rituals are also performed; these include appeasing *ori* (the head) if it has not been done before now. In Yoruba traditional thought, *Ori* is the source and the most active ingredient of the psychological and philosophical identity of man. By *Ori*, the Yoruba are not merely referring to the physical head but the inner head - "*ori inu*". However, it is believed that the physical head is a representation of the inner head⁴⁰⁸. So if the appeasement of *ori* has not been done before the engagement ceremony it is now done as Yoruba's reason: "*Ori ni gbeni k'orisa o to gbeniyan*" - 'It is the inner head that helps one first before deity.'

In addition to this, if the girl belongs to a prayer-group (spiritual peer-group), she has to formally notify them. This ceremony will be performed in part and the notification secretly passed on and concluded on the first night so that her Egbe can support her in her new status. An *Emere* is also appeased and all the rituals performed so that she will not depart with *oko-orun* (the spiritual husband) and throw everyone into confusion.

For those who are *Arugba* (the carriers) of various deities like *Oshun*, *Otin*, *Obatala* or *Orisha oko*, the wedding had to coincide with her last appearance when a successor or successors have been chosen. She also has to announce formally at the *ojubo* (site shrine), and on her return from *ojubo* that she will be getting married soon⁴⁰⁹. By tradition, only virgins can be carriers *Arugba* - various Yoruba deities. Once one of the carriers is ripe enough for a married state, she has to announce formally her intention to discontinue as a carrier because she is getting married so that a young virgin substitute could be provided.

⁴⁰⁸ Abimbola, W., Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1976, p.114.

⁴⁰⁹ Collected from the informants on the field.

3.3.2.5 *The Wedding*

There used to be three noticeable versions of marriage, but we shall focus attention on the most common.

The first is elopemental marriage in which only dual-facet consent is present - that of the bride and bridegroom. When the couple-to-be fears parental opposition, putting a long distance between the mother's family and the daughter's family is considered an effective solution until the cloud of anger clears⁴¹⁰. "Capture" system is the second. This is a system whereby the bridegroom dramatises the pre-colonial ethnic war days of capturing women who eventually become the wives of the captor. Joseph Ogunduyilemi has rephrased the third system as "sexta-facet consent marriage" because of the negative outlook of the description as it was referred to as "purchase" marriage because of the bride-wealth factor⁴¹¹. Our references to Yoruba marriage procedure are centred on monogamy in relation to the third system of marriage.

The Yoruba traditional marriage is normally fixed for the end or commencement of the dry season preferably at a time when harvest is ripe or to coincide with a festival of wide appeal in the town. In the olden times there were mass weddings, but this gradually declined in popularity and practice due to a number of factors in our communities. Such factors like religion - both Christianity and Islam; Colonial administration which frowns at most mass programmes to avoid civil unrest until they were sure of their footings, and education which propagated a Western culture that regarded such as uncivilised and only for illiterates. There is still evidence of some mass weddings at Ajase-ipo, Okeya, Shao (a tourist centre) Kwara

⁴¹⁰ Wife abduction takes place when a bride consents to being snatched. Young men from the compound of the groom abduct her on her way to the farm or stream. This was common to the military class who abducted girls of their fancy and sent messages to the parents or grooms to be a show of 'I-dare-you'. This was common during the various civil wars. Some girls prefer pre-marital pregnancy today in order to silence their family who may wish to go against their interest.

⁴¹¹ Ogunduyilemi, J.T., The Mothers-in-law Among the Yorubas and the Stability of the Christian Family: A Pastoral Suggestion, Roma: Pontificia Universitas Lateranense Press, 1983, p.13.

and among the Ogori Magongo of Kogi state. The case of Ogoris is tied to the famous Oviasese maiden festival.

The wedding day proper is divided into three main parts - namely the activities as a prelude to the departure of the bride, the departure and reception of the bride at the groom's house, ending in the chamber, and the morning celebrations. This is followed by the "honeymoon" the outing and *idupe* (thanksgiving). These elaborate preparatory steps have faded and are of no serious consequence today.

In the early morning of the day of wedding, the parents and relatives especially the women gather round the bride in their final bid at instructing her of the new role as a wife, to reassess her well-plaited hair, anoint her head with oil and the beads for her waist. Each step is accompanied by prayers ending in the refrain that she will witness her children's wedding and be granted long-life. The Christian nuptial blessings stresses this last aspect of witnessing their "children's children" as a way of long-life for couples during the wedding⁴¹². If any of the parents is deceased, she is accompanied to the grave for a short ritual where she invokes the spirit of the deceased to ensure that the occasion is a success.

After this, the peer-group of the bride are ready with mild choruses teasing the bride and urging her to cover her face lest another bride is 'rushed' to meet her husband. From here the bridal chants commence from the door step of the mother (*Rara* or *Ekun-Iyawo*). The bridal chant is taken round the town excluding the groom's compound. This is done by the peer-group to alert the entire community of a rite of passage to full adulthood of another of their age-group; and to officially announce that the lady's house is no-go area for bachelors who might be interested in her as she is now married⁴¹³. If one or two brides meet they exchange pleasantries and challenges or if she returns on passing the grave of the parents she sings the praises of the departed parents and asks for their help thus:

*"Alakanji- baba mi,
tati were ni tekule ile,
Abiyamo kan kii sun
Ko gbagbe omo re
mo ni oni lojo pe
ojo ti mo nlo ile oko
ng o fi bi ta bi mi 'le*

⁴¹² Cf. The Catholic Format of the Nuptial Blessing in the Liturgy of Marriage-Rites.

⁴¹³ Recorded interview with Dr. Ilesanmi. Op. cit.

*ile ti mo fi 'le o gbodo wo,
odede ti mo ba wo
o gbodo daru
ki waju re o maa dara lo
kehin re o si tubo maa sun oan
ki n fotun gbomo jo, kin fehin gbomo pon
oju ti won n wo yi, oju oge
ibadi yii ibadi ileke
ojo oni ojo eye
ire loni ori mi
a fi ire."*

Response:

*"Ire loni ori re a fire
Akanji baba wa o sun,
oni ko ma foya kini kan
ohun kan ko ni se o
oni oo ma bare,
ko bi ako ko babo,
ko dagba ko darugbo
ojo oni ojo eye
Ire loni ori re a fiire."*

(A brief summary translation of these bridal chants is that the bride asks for blessing from her deceased parent/s as she joins a new family by marriage leaving her own paternal family. It is the belief of the Yorubas that their deceased ancestor/s is still very much part of the living, hence they called them the living dead)⁴¹⁴.

The chant will reflect the beauty of language, current social or political issues and reflect the family connections and prayers for success of the marriage. In these chants, farewell messages are expressed by the bride, and blessings are solicited from all the extended members of the family.

Elaborate rituals accompany each stage of this final rite⁴¹⁵. When they return from the bridal chant she returns to the room to change her dress. The bride is then conducted to the

⁴¹⁴ These bridal-chants were recorded during one of the traditional weddings at Aawe, a rural Yoruba village during the field work - November 1994.

⁴¹⁵ Adeoye, C.L., "Asa Igbeyawo", *Asa ati Ise Yoruba*, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp.219-239.

home of the bridegroom, always in the night, well-dressed in her best clothes with a thin white cloth for a veil and attended by her companions. According to Thomas Ilesanmi, "the bride carries with her the emblems of her family deity since she is free to worship her family deity as well as the deity of her new home"⁴¹⁶. The emblems may be in the form of carved images representing the belief and affinity or loyalty to the family. She is also equipped from her home with everything that appertains to the female department of house-keeping, including cooking utensils, brooms, and other articles for house use. There is a common belief among Yoruba parents (especially the mother) that the mother is expected to make her in-put, hence the Yoruba phrase "*O diru iyawo fomo*". This is to highlight an accompaniment in her last duty to the bride as a single girl, signifying one of the transit-actions of moral and historical importance.

After this the father, surrounded by other relations, now prays over her, the mother is called to pray last - and often tears roll freely as she prays because her daughter is parting from her and taking up another responsibility in another family. Others intone that - 'they are tears of joy' - "*Ekun ayo ni*" . 'It is enough' - "*o-to*". This is the parting, the party now departs at dusk as earlier noted for the groom's compound.

The entourage comprises the bride, *omo iyawo* or *enini* - a young girl chosen to be in residence with the bride for a period of time, representative of her age group, some wives from the paternal compound and the bearers of the bridal luggage. With the exception of the young girl, all other entourage will return that same evening or at most, the following morning.

3.3.2.6 The Reception

As soon as the 'spies' confirm the approach of the bridal party, the head-wife or *Iyaale* and other wives will meet them at the entrance of the compound. There some little rituals are performed⁴¹⁷, some of which are as follows:

⁴¹⁶ Ilesanmi, T.M., Op. cit. p.6.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. "Daramola, O., "*Asa Igbeyawo ni Ile Yoruba*" in Olajubu Oludare ed., *Iwe Asa Ibile Yoruba*, Nigeria: Longman, 1978, p.55. He expatiates on the various articles used for the rituals like the washing of the new bride's feet as a symbol of peace and acceptance before being grafted into her new family by marriage and the various prayers offered for her.

She will be stripped with the beads serving as cover. In later times, this was reduced to washing of the feet. This is followed by breaking of the covered calabash with the words recited as follows:

*“Bo ba fe lo nile yi,
fun wa nigba wa o”.*

‘If you decide to leave us please return this calabash’, in other words, they are simply saying that her grafting into the family is permanent and indissoluble.

After this ritual, she is physically lifted (*Igbeyawo* - lifting of the bride - which is the word used for marriage) and put down on the family’s ancestral spot where a pronouncement is made thus:

*“Iyawo Akanni o,
oni gbodo fo,
Asiko re nile yi
ko san wa sowo,
ko san wa somo,
ko san wa si aiku,
baale oro -Ase”.*

“This is Akanni’s wife,
her stay in this compound
should be marked with
prosperity, fertility and health”⁴¹⁸.

She is then taken to the *Baale* or *Olori-ebi* who offers prayers and from there to the homestead of the husband where the *Iyaale* (the mother-in-law) or the immediate senior wife gladly takes her hand and leads her in with assurances that she will not suffer. Her age-group are further shown other wives and assured of care and affection. She is from here led to her room where the mother-in-law presents her with her own gifts of dresses. It is part of the traditional rule that the husband must not be at home, he is to arrive after the new bride must have settled, and join her in the chambers.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. p.55.

The next morning "a white cloth stained with blood of her lacerated hymen is presented as an evidence of her virginity"⁴¹⁹. There is joyful celebration on the morning following the consummation of the marriage when the girl's purity is confirmed. As a result of her purity through her virginity, gifts and items symbolizing her fullness are sent to the parents⁴²⁰. In early times, a folklore tune goes thus:

*"Tun mi gbe oko tun mi gbe, iyawo dun losigin, Ile aye yemi- ile yi dara pupo
tun mi gbe"*

"marriage is desirable, it makes the world beautiful, marry me afresh"⁴²¹.

Those involved in traditional marriage in Yoruba are key members of the family as this is an event making a point of convergence among members and a foundation of another line. Mbiti aptly put this when he says:

"Marriage provides for new social relationships to be established between the families and relatives involved. It extends the web of kinship socially"⁴²².

It often leads to the sprouting of an homestead and extension of the compound. The in-laws are involved, both on the paternal and maternal sides. The in-laws of the father or the bride make a formidable presence at the departure, while those of the father of the groom wait eagerly till the arrival of the bride. They must have been there since morning.

One important fact to note is that Yoruba customary marriage does not bring a new family or a new social unit into existence. Rather, it is just a means to assure the continuity of

⁴¹⁹ Ilesanmi, T.M., Op. cit. p.6.

⁴²⁰ Kegs of palmwine, boxes of matches, alligator pepper and pads of kolanuts and the white-blood stained cloth are sent if pure but if she has lost her virginity before she got married, a leaking basket, half-keg of palmwine and half volume of matches are sent. This was seen to be a disgrace on the bride's family.

⁴²¹ This folklore is in reference to the freshness "marry me afresh".

⁴²² Mbiti, J.S., Op. cit. p.105.

the extended family⁴²³. What Mba says of customary marriage of Igbo in this manner equally applies to the traditional Yoruba society that:

“In our custom...marriage does not only unite the husband and wife in matrimonial life but also unites the two families in legal relationship of stronger nature than in many parts of the world. Married couples, though living their conjugal life separately from other families of the kindred group yet form part of the large family known as the extended family”⁴²⁴.

The observation made in East Africa applies also to the Yoruba:

“In Europe, young people found a household when they get married, whereas in Africa, a girl, when she marries, enters an already existent family to give it increase”⁴²⁵.

This is what marriage and getting married mean for the Yoruba. Everybody is involved in making the occasion a reality and huge success. According to George Ehusani, the marriage ceremony itself is a celebration of life. People turn out in large numbers to witness this celebration. Like all other occasions, the greatness of a marriage ceremony is judged by the number of people in attendance, not so much by the amount of money spent for entertainment. The bride's parents make sure that they give their daughter in marriage to a man who 'has people'⁴²⁶. There was corporate responsibility in the marriage of every member of the extended family. Marital stability was very much dependent on the corporate or extended family system and the mode of social and economic life of the people. Through the operation of this system every member of the group felt concerned about the success or failure of the affairs of any group member.

⁴²³ This is one of the main reasons why Yoruba traditional marriages remain community affairs between families.

⁴²⁴ Mba, C.S., "Matrimonial Consent in Igbo Marriages", Unpublished thesis, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, 1964, p.94.

⁴²⁵ Andre, M., La femme noire en Afrique occidentale, Paris, 1960, p.48.

⁴²⁶ Ehusani, G.O., An Afro-Christian Vision: "OZOVEHE", New York: University Press of America, 1991, p.173.

Because of this corporate responsibility in every marriage and family life, the incoming bride had to identify herself completely with the fortunes of near and far relatives of the bridegroom, and the bridegroom must do the same with the people's social growth and numerical strength. Hence people used to say that an 'in-law' is a relation in the third degree⁴²⁷. Driving home this fact, Benezeri *et al.*, referred to an address by a Zulu pastor to a pair of newly-weds in the following words:

“Mapule, you should bear in mind that though you are married in the Church, and, for we Africans, according to our custom and tradition, it is considered that you are married not to your husband Paul, but to his family. That means you have to identify completely with his relatives, look after them, care for them, go out of your way to make them happy. If you do that, you will have no cause for regret. You, Paul, will have to do likewise with Mapule's relatives. Her people are your people and vice-versa. Both of you will notice that old people in the community will tend to visit you, even for a brief moment, not necessarily to drink tea, but to show their interest in your welfare”⁴²⁸.

The roles of the parents in the traditional weddings are involved from the first of the three stages to the third, accepting proposals, undertaking responsibilities to guide and support morally the couple and giving blessings (*Adura*) a duty that must be performed religiously. The necessary sacrifices are also made to the appropriate gods/goddesses and pledges are fulfilled.

Age-grade associations too add colour to the ceremony and provide moral support. The kith and kin in the compound are on hand to meet religious and social obligations on the very day and to give moral support after.

3.4 Peculiarities Marking Yoruba Wedded Life

Certain universal peculiarities mark the traditional wedded life among the Yoruba. These are:

⁴²⁷ The name “ana” - ‘in-law’ - among the Yoruba simply means a very close relation by alliance. In this case, an alliance through the contract of marriage.

⁴²⁸ Benezeri, K., Laurenti, M., & Shorter, A., African Christian Marriage, London and Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977.

Women are never really married twice; they may be inherited as widows, or taken for a wife outside the late husband's family, but the marriage ceremony is never undergone again under any circumstances⁴²⁹.

Once married, they are attached forever to the house and family of their deceased husbands; hence, it is more usual for widows to choose another husband from the same family.

No woman is without a husband, except in extreme old age, but every woman must in any case have a male protector who is responsible for her.

Divorce is so rare as to be practically considered as non-existing. According to Fadipe:

"divorce in Yoruba society used to be very rare. Divorce was allowed in customary marriage, but only in principle. In practice divorce was not common, and it hardly ever took place between a man and his wife unless the woman was guilty of some legal or ritual abomination and this was not common. This was because senior relatives and the entire community that witnessed the traditional weddings would put pressure on the couple to reconcile their differences"⁴³⁰.

Hence if a man got tired of his wife he had to keep her for the sake of the extended family to which the woman had become a part and a full member. Indeed it was not only that divorce between man and his wife was not easily granted, but also death was not thought to break the bond of marriage. Grounds for divorce then included laziness, indebtedness, dishonesty or insanity of the husband or wife which should have been detected before they got married and would have prevented them going further through the discreet but thorough enquiries made.

A woman divorced from her husband can never be remarried, or taken up legally by another man: hence the saying "*A kii su opo alaaye*" - 'no one can inherit the relic of a living man'⁴³¹. However, Abe has posited a contrary opinion in view of colonisation of British laws over the traditional marriage stability of the Yoruba group with the clause that permitted divorce. He says: "once divorce is legally granted, either party may remarry"⁴³².

⁴²⁹ Johnson, S., Op. cit. p.116.

⁴³⁰ Fadipe, N. A., Op. cit. Chapter 4.

⁴³¹ Ilesanmi, T.M., Op. cit.

⁴³² Abe, G.O., Op. cit. p.14.

3.5 *Present Traditional Modes*

Yoruba marriage traditions have been altered over the years due to the influence of urbanisation. With the advent of education, the language barrier for educated youths in particular is broken since English is adopted as the national language. With a common language, there are lots of opportunities created for social interaction like co-education, communal work, and other social gatherings, so that youths select marriage partners for themselves. Levels of exogamy vary with opportunities and attitudes: the heterogeneity of the town and sex-ratio of one's group, the level of ethnic competition and tolerance, the position of one's group, religion, education, and spatial and social mobility. In some cases, early migrants usually found a wife at home, as is common today⁴³³. But quite a few married local women if home was some distance away, as very few of their own women were present in the town.

Today, with more balanced sex-ratios⁴³⁴, it is easy to find a spouse of one's own group or a girl from home who is anxious to marry a migrant, though rural non-migrants may resent the competition. John Osom's analysis of the hike in bride-wealth in some parts of Nigeria may not be unconnected with the rise in the inter-ethnic marriages today. According to him:

"Marriage is nothing other than a fund-raising business in the Eastern parts of Nigeria since some parents see the occasion of their daughter's marriage as an opportunity to make or raise as much as possible to the detriment of the suitors"⁴³⁵.

While bride-wealth is very high in the Eastern parts, it is not high among the Yoruba. So a lot of those who cannot afford the outrageous hike of bride-wealth in the East easily find succour in marrying from the other parts of the country where bride-wealth is not considered as a fund-raising venture. We observed this during the field work and it was reflected in some of the responses of our informants. For example a civil servant, married, interviewed from Lagos who hails from Usi-Ekiti, one of the sub-Yoruba groups says:

⁴³³ About six of our informants told us that they got their wives through their parents in their villages.

⁴³⁴ Cf. Appendix on brief facts about Nigeria. The 1991 population census figures shows a one-to-one balance in the sex-ratio of males and females in nearly all the states of Nigeria.

⁴³⁵ Osom, J., *Op. cit.* p.45.

“Dowry or bride-wealth is not essential, acceptance depends on individuals”⁴³⁶.

The few responses like his reflect the attitude of the Yoruba towards bride-wealth. They see bride-wealth as important but do not enjoy or tolerate the abuse of it as is the case in some parts of the country. Their attitude to this has consequently increased the levels of ethnic exogamy marriages, although, some parents within the rural areas still oppose this arrangement⁴³⁷. Their major opposition comes from the fact that: “our daughter or son must marry one of us”.

The well-educated and those who have grown up in town are somewhat likely to marry exogamously, but ethnically endogamous marriage still remains the norm. Strong pressure is put on young people to marry ‘one of us’ because common customs, language, and expectations minimize conflicts between spouses and affinal kin and affiliation problems for the children⁴³⁸. Young people who grow in town meet ‘strangers’ at school and in wage-employment. As discussed earlier, they often want to take their own choice, and prefer someone who is equally educated like them. They may be willing to forgo the customary bride-wealth or be able to pay it themselves.

In major centres like Lagos, the ceremony of *ekun iyawo* has been phased out and has been replaced by a three-stage arrangement that involves - introduction, formal meeting of families, a replica of the old, engagement; the exchange of gifts and the blessing of the couple. From this stage in Lagos celebration, pregnancy and even change of name is allowed. The wedding proper, which may be traditional formal blessings, may be accompanied by formal documentation at marriage registry. It is pertinent to note the fact that because of mobility in job employment, men whose work compels them to be always in transit also feel less tied to

⁴³⁶ Anthony Kayode, (aged 43yrs), married, in Lagos Nov. 1994.

⁴³⁷ Some of our informants would not accept exogamy marriages for the sake of keeping intact the valued Yoruba tradition.

⁴³⁸ This belief of the Yoruba was confirmed by the majority of our informants who have a strong belief in endogamous marriage.

communal values than more stabilized individuals. To such people, occupational community is more important than the approval of their distant, extended family⁴³⁹.

Today, an Islamic wedding or a colourful Church marriage with a lavish reception is called a society wedding. Thus the observation of John Mbiti aptly fits into the Yoruba situation today that "another custom of letting the young people themselves find the persons they want to marry and then inform their parents or relatives about it, is gradually introduced"⁴⁴⁰.

At Ibadan, bridal trains are limited to hard-core indigenous areas like Agungu; Itutaba; Beere; Mapo; Eleeta and Idi-Arere and usually among the illiterates. The educated elites have adopted the system of write-in. This is a kind of formal request but in written form by the proposed bride-groom's family to the bride-to-be's family asking their daughter's hand in marriage. It was initially introduced by the freed slaves returners who settled in Lagos and Abeokuta but the practice was later taken over by most Yoruba urban communities as part of Western influence on their marriage culture. This will, in today's parlance, be a substitute for the role of an intermediary as the role is virtually non-existing.

At Osogbo, Ilorin, it is still common to meet a bridal procession around Oja-oba, Okebale, Isale-Osun and Popo areas and Pakata, Oloje, Omoda and Akodudu respectively⁴⁴¹.

As already stated, the most prevalent system described in this thesis is what obtains now among the elites. The illiterates of the rural side have only differed in one main aspect and that is bachelors and spinsters now present their choices to the family devoid of *alarina*. The role of *alarina* has been reduced in importance by social developments and urbanisation,

⁴³⁹ There was a pronounced case of such a marriage of convenience observed during the field work where young ladies attached themselves to married men who live far away from their family because of job mobility. Such marriages have a nickname in Nigeria as "Abuja Marriage". Abuja is the new federal capital of Nigeria. Since it has not been well-developed in terms of housing units, families are forced to stay apart. While the husband may be working in Abuja, the other parts of the family may remain in Lagos.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. Mbiti, J.S., Op. cit. p.100.

⁴⁴¹ These areas are predominantly traditional hard-core Yoruba areas that have little impact of Westernization. The practice here is still well-pronounced.

while the task has been made much more difficult, if not impossible, due to inter-ethnic marriages, workplace, school association and Church programmes that have brought many together and provided opportunity to 'size-up' each other and the influence of love induced marital relationships based on Christian and Western values.

In each village or city now, there is a formal introduction. After the introduction, which is colourfully-handled by paid people who serve as 'Masters of Ceremony', combining the role of 'iyawo ile' and 'jesters', the letter is presented and an introduction of parties made. Representatives in most cases are elder sisters of the husband or Christian communities from their various Church affiliations (especially where a religious divide has now caused the displeasure of the parents). A date is fixed, cards printed and elaborate arrangements made for extras like video coverage, *aso-ebi* (family uniform, now among friends rather than family members) and night-parties. But unfortunately the long cherished custom of authentic marriage enquiries, negotiations, betrothal and courtship period is discarded or neglected in the process. The processes have been muddled up today in a rush to get married. For example, in Lagos, most of the processes in traditional wedding are further minimized. One of our informants aptly opined:

"I was programmed through the marriage ceremonies in under three months. This was done quickly so that I could join my husband in the city",⁴⁴².

The consummation aspect of marriage on the night of the marriage is, however, excluded as most couples have had pre-marital sexual relations: often evidenced with a child or conspicuous pregnancy. During the period of my stay in Regina Mundi Parish Mushin Lagos, two women among a sample survey of ten gave birth a week before weddings, one on the wedding day and three within six weeks of their wedding.

Those involved in some of the traditional wedding today are few in comparison to age long customs. Often they include the immediate parents, few close-relations, neighbours and office friends, hired-engagement bearers and band drummers hired to add colours to the ceremony⁴⁴³.

⁴⁴² Tape-recorded interview with Mrs. Adebayo, one of the informants.

⁴⁴³ We observed that this practice is common with the so-called "Born-Again Christians" who prefer their Church members to the traditional communities. This, according to

The philosophical concept of marriage as a social affair and as such the concern of everyone in the two families of the intended couple in Yoruba traditional society is now gradually changing; it is more or less a personal affair and so the communal marriage preparation is discarded nowadays by the youth. As already stated above, the youth just casually decide to stay together as husband and wife without the customary marriage enquiry which is one of the *sine qua non* conditions for marriage stability. Mrs. Aderibigbe on cohabitation among the Yoruba youths says:

“More often among our youths today, what obtains in urban places is “*Iyawo-ikoko*”- cohabitation at times without the intention for marriage. They live together as long as they enjoy themselves”⁴⁴⁴.

In certain cases in which the parents of the young man, for example, are opposed to such a marriage in which there is nothing known about the background of the girl to be married, or the parents perhaps would have known from their observation that the girl would not be a suitable marriage partner, the young man, as happens, might leave the home or village and either establish his own home or takes the girl to any town where they continue to live together to avoid parental opposition. This is well summarized and backed up by Joseph Ekarika thus:

“As it is today, young people do not feel the need or bother about their parents having to do with their marriage decisions. They think they can decide to get engaged with whom they want and the parents’ concern is looked upon as an unwholesome intrusion”⁴⁴⁵.

Arthur Phillips and Henry Morris make the same observation when they remark that:

“In attempting an analysis of modern trends, mention should perhaps first be made of the diminishing importance of the collective or group aspect of marriage. Emphasis is shifting to the individual aspect of marriage as a relationship between two persons. As regards the prospective husband’s

some of our informants, has to do with their new religious tenets.

⁴⁴⁴ Mrs. Aderibigbe, an informant.

⁴⁴⁵ Ekarika, J.P., Maidenhood: Boudoir Mysteries in Traditional Puberty Initiations, Italy, 1984, p.150.

capacity, it very often happens nowadays that a young man is entirely a free-agent. His ability to provide the necessary bride-price out of his own earnings, make him in practice, fully independent of his kinsfolk”⁴⁴⁶.

Michael Fagun (a bishop and an informant) equally made a remark on the effect the so-called individualism has on Yoruba and indeed Nigerian society today when he was asked the question: “What are the factors responsible for the changes in Yoruba family lives today?” His response:

“Things fall apart, there is no passion for family life anymore, we are now in a pluralistic society which is very materialistic and selfish. The economic factor is dictated by the Western nations. There are now cash values which warranted residence in the urban areas. The West which is a consumer society sells this to us. We are not grounded in the culture of what they sold to us. The West posture is *‘I dictate to you how you slave for me’*. This has a disruptive effect on our society e.g. the automobiles etc. we suffer for this even when we cannot make it. We have a pluralistic background”⁴⁴⁷.

Adrian Hastings shares this same view when he says:

“While in the past it was a payment from a group (the bridegroom’s kindred) to a group (the bride’s kindred) really symbolizing the relationship between two lineages, today it is very frequently no more than a payment from one person (the bridegroom) to a man, the bride’s father. It is predominantly paid in money and in many places the sum involved has greatly escalated”⁴⁴⁸.

Testing the reactions of the population sampled further on this point during the field work, a couple interviewed - Mr. & Mrs. A. Taiwo aged 37 and 35 years old respectively - were asked: should the traditional marriage be eliminated for Christian or Western weddings? In their response, they unanimously favour the continuity of the traditional wedding. They made further comments:

⁴⁴⁶ Phillips, A., & Morris, H.F., Marriage Laws in Africa, London: Oxford University, 1971, p.9.

⁴⁴⁷ Interview with Bishop Michael Fagun, Catholic Bishop of Ekiti Diocese, (aged 60yrs), in April 1995 at his official residence in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

⁴⁴⁸ Hastings, A., Op. cit. p.39.

“Traditional marriage is more stable than modern-day marriage, the elders have wisdom. Today’s marriage lacks proper homework hence it breaks readily”⁴⁴⁹.

According to him, there must be a way of reconciling the two cultures giving the fact of support and solidarity enjoyed from the traditional society.

Although it might be affirmed that this modern practice of getting married has the advantage of removing traditional obstacles of constraint and creates space for personal and free choice of partners, which no doubt is the constitutive aspect of marriage, yet the ‘picture as a whole’ is one of instability and a greater laxity of morals consequent upon the rejection of traditional sanctions and restraints. Erich Fromm’s thesis suffices here when he says:

“Freedom does not mean the freedom from all guiding principles but rather the freedom to grow according to the laws of the structure of human existence”⁴⁵⁰.

Obviously from the responses on the field regarding this matter, a lot of our informants are of the opinion that many marriages as such mentioned above do not stand the test of time since those involved (the couples) are not prepared to receive any advice from the elders. And so instead of having a peaceful and stable family, as was the case in the past, the contemporary family is more or less turned into a sort of ‘warfront’ on account of quarrelling and even fighting over a small misunderstanding between the couple. And this of course leads to crisis in their family which often leads to broken marriages and the resultant effect is that in the event of some family crisis, those who have once turned their backs to their villages of origin would consequently reflect on their roots and seek the co-operation of family members to give a helping hand. Although the lack of conflict in the past might have been a result of imposed silence, nevertheless, a lot of informants believe there is a wide gap between the peace experienced at homes in the past and the instability experienced among the young married families today.

⁴⁴⁹ Response to the interview using their own wordings.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. Fromm, E., To Have or To Be, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1987, p.88.

3.6 Life after Marriage

As already mentioned, Yoruba marriage is complete after the hangover ceremony. The new bride is not left to start a new home and a new family, but she enters into an already existent family to begin a new life different from the one she had led as a spinster in her parents home. She is now known and addressed as “*Iyawo*” (wife). She has to contend with the different demands of her new role. One such is the family life.

3.6.1 Family Life after Marriage

Family life among the Yoruba is marked by three important land marks namely, birth, marriage and death. These in between have steps that are graduated.

Marriage is the bedrock of family life. The family established at marriage is a cultural institution for primary growth and nurturing⁴⁵¹. At marriage as we have seen from the chapter, the parents ensure that their wards get the right partners as the union is permanent in nature. The groom’s family exercises considerable authority in that no *Baale* or *Baba* wants the wrong person in his compound, they want the very best. The in-laws also want their daughter to be married to a decent family.

Insuring this involves thorough investigation as we have seen in the work of *alarina*, *Iya* consultation and appeasement of *Ori*, accompanied by other rituals and rites.

Prominent in the bride’s new life are the father and mother-in-law. We shall lay emphasis on the mother-in-law because we cannot treat the bride’s new life without reference to mother-in-law as we discovered the place of mother-in-law during the field work. One in every three couples interviewed had major contributions to make on their mothers-in-law.

We gather from interviews on the field that right from the start the success or failure of the new marriage will depend on her good relationship with her mother-in-law. Mother-in-law in literal sense means ‘*Iya Oke*’ (my husband’s mother). The term “mother-in-law, apart from denoting a role and a classification of certain women indicates post-marital and post-matrimonial relationships⁴⁵². On a wider level, it has an interfamilial socio-economic, socio-cultural and political connotation. It signifies the members of a family with whom one negotiates a bride-wealth in order to have a marital relationship. And this requires doing

⁴⁵¹ Igbineweka, F.E., The Sacrament of Marriage and Childlessness in Edo. Pastoral Problems and Possible Solutions, Rome, 1987, p.22.

⁴⁵² Ogunduyilemi, J.T., Op. cit. p.46.

things according to the way of life of the people⁴⁵³. Thus in Yoruba, the new bride calls all elder women of her husband's family as "*Iya Oke*" (the mother of my husband) for these are her first serious contacts with the extended family of her husband. She also recognizes that their role is indispensable and that the success of her marriage depends on her relationship with them.

A general interview with Yoruba-speaking couples and some parish priests across the dioceses within the Yoruba-speaking areas indicated that in a traditional Yoruba community, the life of the new bride, apart from her husband is centred around her mother-in-law. There was a consensus of opinion about the unique place of mother-in-law in the stability of any marriage within the Yoruba community. Some of the responses to the interview on the role a mother-in-law plays in the lives of young couples are:

Mrs A. Taiwo: "They have been of tremendous moral support, sometimes financial too. They are for me";

Mrs. C. Ajayi: "Respect to in-laws is very essential because they can make the marriage work or not";

Mrs. V. Adejo: "Our conflict was resolved with the help of our in-laws especially our mother-in-law, and father-in-law is very forthcoming; often times he gives financial assistance";

Mrs. F. Abiodun: "In-laws act as arbitrators, no room for courts, the family exercises judicial powers";

Mrs. J. Dada: "my in-laws are very supportive";

Mrs. A. Aina: "my mother-in-law really made life difficult for me because I have female children, she even wanted my husband to take another wife"⁴⁵⁴.

In all, most of them realised the vital role of mothers-in-law in the society and accorded it a great recognition. Because of the indispensable role a mother-in-law plays in the life of married couples in Yorubaland, Joseph Ogunduyilemi has devoted his doctoral thesis to

⁴⁵³ Ogunduyilemi, J.T., Op. cit. p.47.

⁴⁵⁴ A Consensus of opinions on the role of in-laws gathered from interviews from our informants.

“The Mother-in-law among the Yoruba and the Stability of the Christian Marriage”⁴⁵⁵. The mother-in-law is responsible for the formation of the new bride. In the rural areas, the son, even when married, lives in the same compound with his parents. When the son has tertiary education and has to go outside his environment, his wife stays with his parents. The husband comes home at weekends, or if the place is far away, every last weekend of the month, or any day suitable for him. There is a socio-economic dependence on the part of the parents while the parents give in return socio-cultural belonging which no money can buy⁴⁵⁶.

The new bride depends on her mother-in-law for such training as learning more about the family laws, the do's and don'ts of the family, respect for members of the extended family, knowing them and how to address each one as has already been noted in this chapter. Above all, respect for her husband, and what type of, and how to prepare, dishes he loves best.

Her training is not restricted to the home alone but also her behaviour in the public and within the community. Unlike Christian and Western cultures where the 'ring' is the outward sign of marriage, the Yoruba outward signs of marriage are the type of dresses and hair-do worn by them. Also their good behaviour in the public is highly recommended.

The focal point of her new life is knowing in detail about sex, pregnancy, and birth. As we have earlier noted, the first pregnancy, as the beginning of a new life, indicates that a new member of the family is on the way. It is also a sign of the arrival of the young wife to full communion with the family. She therefore becomes a special person and she receives special treatment and training to cope with her new state. It is the duty of her extended family and especially her mother-in-law who have in themselves gone through the stages to teach her. The period is regarded as sacred for the pregnant bride and her unborn child. The family thus steps in with regulations to decide what she would not do and prescribe what they think useful, all of which is intended for the protection and safety of both herself and her child. There are several taboos and regulations which she must know, because in Yoruba tradition, pregnancy in effect makes the woman ritually impure. For example, one of the most common regulations concerns sexual intercourse during the period of gestation. Hence Bradbury notes that “sexual intercourse should stop in the sixth month of pregnancy and earlier if the husband has more

⁴⁵⁵ Ogunduyilemi, J.T., The Mothers-in-law among the Yorubas and the Stability of the Christian Family: A Pastoral Suggestion, Roma, 1983.

⁴⁵⁶ Ogunduyilemi, J.T., Op.cit. p.49.

than one wife”⁴⁵⁷. These oftentimes in contemporary Yoruba society do breed bad blood between the new bride and the mother-in-law. In response to questions on this matter, one of our informants said:

“I see my mother-in-law’s role here as exercising total control over our life by monitoring our sexual life”⁴⁵⁸

3.7 Conclusion

We have briefly scanned through the Yoruba traditional marriage system. We have highlighted some special values and merits of Yoruba traditional marriage from which something can be learnt for the enrichment of the Christian marriage system.

One of these values is the influence of group solidarity in the marriage of group members. For the extended family, solidarity offers a basis for the corporate responsibility that helps in stabilizing marital life in the group. For example, where the husband was wicked or too immature for a satisfactory married life, the wife did not run away but remained for the sake of the group which also took real interest in the marriage and curbed excesses on either side⁴⁵⁹.

Every member of the groom’s family group would call the incoming member ‘my wife’ and gave her gifts to make her happy but without desiring any conjugal rights or expression, for that would be an abominable thing and could lead to a swift social rift and even ostracization or the banishment of the culprit. There was certainly more sex control in the group than in the present-day, open and liberal society. In addition, children born in the community were called *omo-wa* (our children); and their good upbringing was regarded as a corporate responsibility of the group, for any ill-bred child was a communal disgrace⁴⁶⁰.

⁴⁵⁷ Bradbury, R.E., The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking People of South-Western Nigeria, London: International Institute, 1975, p.152.

⁴⁵⁸ Tape-recorded interview with Mrs. Adesoba, an informant and a civil servant.

⁴⁵⁹ For example, a reference to some of the informants who claim their in-laws have been a source of help and stability in their marriage.

⁴⁶⁰ AFER, Oct. 1976, Vol.18 .n.5. p.304.

The flaws of this system were few. The wider society took a heightened interest in the choice of mates by their members since the fortunes of one were the fortunes of all. The people wanted to be sure of the type of people with whom they were forming a bond. So that in certain cases, the young people had to face stiff opposition from the elders when what they (the elders) regarded as a wrong choice was being contemplated by them (the young people)⁴⁶¹.

In the case of parental and the extended family's influence over the choice of mates in the marriages of their children there were flaws, but the flaws were few, such as the excessive meddlesomeness by relatives in the personal choices of marital mates. With a few adaptations and updating, this valuable element in Yoruba traditional marriage could be incorporated into the present system of African Christian marriage to enrich it and to stem the tide of the agonizing and frequently-broken marriages among the Yorubas⁴⁶².

A kind of corollary to this is the question of the place of witnessing to the marriage. We suggest the home of the bride and during the last rites of the Yoruba traditional marriage. This aspect will be discussed in later chapters fully. The priest need not always be there. A lay person can be delegated *ad universitatem* to do the witnessing⁴⁶³. The modalities can be worked out in detail⁴⁶⁴.

Matrimony is a social sacrament. This element should be evident in its administration by involving the extended family or small Christian community. So the values in Yoruba traditional marriage can be made the basis for the take-off of pastoral activity on marriage in this period of the new era of evangelization.

We have therefore treated vividly in this chapter the traditional procedure of Yoruba marriage both in the past and the present modes and above all the importance attached to preparations for Yoruba marriage. We realise that Yoruba marriage, like every other traditional marriage in Nigeria, is not static but dynamic. The Yoruba of yesteryear is not the same Yoruba of today. Yoruba society has come in contact with other peoples of different

⁴⁶¹ Forde, D., Introduction to African Systems of Kinship and Marriage, London: Oxford University Press, 1950, p.26f.

⁴⁶² Vat.II, The Church Today, Austin Flannery ed. p.52.

⁴⁶³ Cf. cc.137, 1112.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. c.1120.

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cultural background and development. Thus other cultural influences have infiltrated into Yoruba marriage and culture. Of note are the Western and Christian cultures which have swept through the fabric of Yoruba life.

We shall, in the next chapter, look at the nature and purpose of Catholic marriage with its theology and the influence this has exerted and still exerts on the culture and marriage procedures of the Yorubas.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: THE CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

4.1 Preamble

Theology has been described as “the study of the relationship between God and humanity, and from this we discover things about God and things about humanity, but essentially as related”⁴⁶⁵.

It is probably fairly easy to realise that no discussion of the theology of marriage can avoid reference to historical situations and development. Marriage is so obviously a human, secular reality, and so clearly varies from one culture to another⁴⁶⁶.

Humanity's relationship with God is a real human fact, it affects people concretely in their historical existence. Because of the inadequacy of humanity's fallen nature, his relationship with God is limited, but the quality and degree of limitation varies from one place and time to another⁴⁶⁷. Therefore a theology cannot be built up only from direct revelation⁴⁶⁸ - which in any case is itself conditioned by time and place - but from seeing how, in fact and in detail, the God-human relationship actually works⁴⁶⁹. We therefore gain our understanding of a particular area of theology very largely by noticing how it has worked out in the past. This is not different when we talk about the development of Catholic theology of marriage.

The development of Catholic theology of marriage in historical sequence, has had much to do with two main sources, namely: Scripture and Tradition. However, the biblical and sacramental dimensions of this theology are accessible to the priest-theologians of the

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. Haughton, R., The Theology of Marriage, Cork: The Mercier Press, 1971, p.13. The inclusive language is mine.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. Schillebeeckx, E., Le Marriage Realite Terrestre et Mystere de Salut, Tome I, Paris, 1966, p.346; Haughton, R., Op. cit. p.14; Fagun, M.O., "Inculturation of Marriage among the Yoruba" in Tit-Bits From the Works of Bishop M.O. Fagun, Op. cit. pp.247-8.

⁴⁶⁷ Haughton, R., Op. cit. p.14.

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. O'Collins, G., S.J., Theology and Revelation, Cork: Mercier Press Ltd., 1968, p.9ff.

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. Whitehead & Whitehead, Op. cit. p.16; Kraft, C.H., Op. cit. p.120.

Western Church and their allies⁴⁷⁰. The experiential, living dimension is not. And without this experiential, living dimension there can be no satisfying theology of marriage. The biblical and sacramental approaches may very quickly seem as unreal and irrelevant as the purely legal unless they are supplemented by the living witness of the married. And not only must they be supplemented by it but the biblical and sacramental elements themselves must be grasped, reflected on and developed by these married Christians.

The Christian marriage as we have it today grew within some specific social contexts. First, according to Fagun, as a social mark of change in life status, marriage gives recognition and social sanction with its rights and obligations on the couple⁴⁷¹. When the Church left the Jewish milieu in the Middle East for Western tradition in Rome and Constantinople, Christian marriage assumed the social norms and legal trappings of the Greek and the Latin peoples. This has continued to this day.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore is to present some of the material on which the Church has had to work in developing her understanding of marriage, its theology and teachings on marriage from the early Christian era to the present. But we are presenting it in such a way that the human quality of it is made apparent, for it is this hard-to-define but all-important sense that shapes the true theological judgement.

A more usual pattern is one which traces the development of the theology of marriage in historical sequence, beginning with marriage in the Old Testament, (with a nod to pagan types of marriage). Consequently, our areas of discussion include the human reality of marriage, Old Testament theology on marriage, the New Testament, the patristic understanding of marriage and theology, marriage contract and canonical form. We will also examine the need to see Christian marriage in its manifold, everyday, existential details, treating them as worthy, immediate and legitimate goals.

4.2 Marriage as a Human Reality

In conformity with the divine plan of creation and redemption, humanity, from the depth of his being, is directed toward the true and good: toward God - Truth and Goodness, the principle of every good and of every truth there is. Such is the human path. A path to pursue

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Dominian, J., Christian Marriage, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977 ed., p.vii.

⁴⁷¹ Fagun, M.O., Tit-Bits From the Works of Bishop M.O. Fagun, Op. cit. p.248.

with his own freedom, where difficulties, shadows, and contradictions are not lacking. Perhaps among them the most fundamental is the contrast between human aspirations for justice, peace, love, generosity, and for the good in all its forms and what human finds, many times, around himself and, even more sadly, within himself⁴⁷².

Like every human reality, marriage and family reveal this disconcerting character. What Edward Schillebeeckx said on the human reality of marriage three decades ago (1966), remains a valid assumption for contemporary marriage. In his writings he declared:

“Any theology of marriage must consider two fundamental points: it must acknowledge without reservation that marriage fully belongs to the world, that it truly is human reality; it must also affirm unconditionally that this very reality, not some extrinsic element of it, has been integrated into the history of salvation. This is not just because Christian life must be lived in this world with all that this implies, but also and especially so because this secular reality, taken up in the organism of salvation has itself become sacramental in the strictest sense of the word”⁴⁷³.

Indeed one could say that with them we deal with one of the areas where today the contrast between the desires whereby one disposes oneself (love, joy, fullness) and the sad situations that often result (divorce, abortion, the refusal to hand on life) is most evident and acute. From this perspective, we see the natural reality of marriage; that marriage is very much a part of creation as the world itself and the men and women who live in it.

4.3 Marriage in the Old Testament

The process towards the theology of marriage in the Old Testament might be summarised as the story of how Christians discovered that marriage was a sacrament, and went on to discover more deeply what that implied⁴⁷⁴. The treatment of the theology of marriage in

⁴⁷² De Haro, R.G., Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium, (Trans. ed), San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1993, p.19.

⁴⁷³ Schillebeeckx, E., Le Marriage Realite Terrestre et Mystere de Salut, Tome I, Paris, 1966, p.346.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Haughton, R., Op. cit. p. 35; Fiorenza, F.S, & Galvin, J.P., eds. Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1992, p. 633.

this section will therefore appear to be a little idealistic, because what theologians through the centuries have to do is to work out what kind of thing marriage is intended to be by God, without worrying too much about how many people actually lived it as God intended, or were even aware of what they should be aiming at.

So in the Old Testament period the Jews gradually discovered an explicit place for marriage in the religious scheme of life, but this began from the existing secular institution. The marriage customs of the Hebrews were similar to those of neighbouring cultures: monogamy was unusual until after the exile, in fact legislation makes specific provision for a second or 'unloved' wife and for concubines⁴⁷⁵. Marriages were easily and normally dissoluble by the husband⁴⁷⁶. The reason for this one-sidedness according to researchers was that the main purpose of marriage in this period was the perpetuation of the husband's clan⁴⁷⁷. This was a practical necessity, but it found its justification in religious thinking, because it was vital that the chosen people should increase 'like the sands on the seashore', but that they should not do this in a haphazard way, losing their sense of communal identity by becoming mixed with foreigners⁴⁷⁸. The idea is very much the same as the Yoruba marriage practice where a newly-wedded couple do not found a new family by marriage but continue one that already exists⁴⁷⁹. The continued existence of clearly-defined tribes, within the Jewish nation, was an important way of ensuring that the people had a strong feeling of 'belonging'.

Among the marriage laws, there were provisions for marriage with a foreign woman captured in war, but special rites ensured that she was virtually removed from her own people⁴⁸⁰. These were the only mixed marriages excepted from the general prohibition.

⁴⁷⁵ Deut. 21: 15-17.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. Rahner, K., ed., Encyclopedia of Theology, London: Hazel, Watson & Viney Ltd., 1975, p.906.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Mackin, T., S.J., Marriage in the Catholic Church, New York: Paulist Press, 1982, p.39; Haughton, R., Op. cit. p.36; Fiorenza, F.S., & Galvin, J.P., Op. cit. p. 634.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Abe, G.O., "The Jewish and Yoruba Social Institution of Marriage: A Comparative Study", Op. cit. p.4.

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. Chapter 3 on Yoruba traditional marriage practices.

⁴⁸⁰ Deut. 21: 10-14.

Israelite women could not marry foreigners, because this removed them entirely from their own people, and their children could not be children of the Covenant⁴⁸¹. This was really an important consideration; for a small and comparatively backward people living among large nations with strong cultural traditions could only hope to continue to exist as a nation if every member knew clearly that he was one of God's people, set apart and made holy to the Lord.

Children were the Lord's blessing on a virtuous marriage, the guarantee of its worth in the eyes of the Lord, which meant in the eyes of a society which thought of itself as God's people⁴⁸². As time went on, the normal and almost universal feeling that fertility is a divine blessing became, for Israel, a more specific doctrine relating the blessing of fertility to the Lord's Covenant with his people, which involved not simply the numerical increase of the people, but, more and more as time went on, education of the children as holy. When, after the exile, only a 'remnant' of the people were left, this emphasis on separateness increased and became fiercer in expression and more distinctly religious in motivation.

The prophets' vision of Yahweh's marriage with Israel was formed by, and also formed, Jewish notions of marriage. With the loss of temporal power, the hopes of the people became increasingly mystical in nature, so that even the more military type of Messianism was laced with the apocalyptic⁴⁸³. In this situation, the place of marriage in the religious set up became theologically more clear-cut. The 'priestly' account of creation frequently makes use of the marriage image to explain the relationship of God and his people: a covenant relationship in both cases, a relationship of vowed love involving the deepest fidelity and bringing joy and blessing of fruitfulness⁴⁸⁴. This according to Haughton might have been a reaction to the mood of doubt of God's purpose, of the possibility of goodness in humans, and in particular in woman, which was prevalent at a time of national humiliation⁴⁸⁵.

⁴⁸¹ Deut. 23:2-3.

⁴⁸² Cf. Abe, G.O., Op. cit. p.15; Haughton, R., Op. cit. p.37; Rahner, K., Op. cit. p.908; Gen. 21: 1-8.

⁴⁸³ Haughton, R., Op. cit. p.37.

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. Gen. 1 & 2:1-4; Hastings, A., Christian Marriage in Africa, London: SPCK, 1974 ed., p. 64.

⁴⁸⁵ Haughton, R., Op. cit., p.38.

However, the fundamental form of the earliest marriage in the history of humanity, according to this biblical source, is the living together as one body, of the wife and husband, which presupposed a monogamous life⁴⁸⁶.

The creation narrative, then, says that woman was created for man's sake, man being in need of help and completion. Woman is created as a suitable helper for Adam, as it were "opposite him"⁴⁸⁷. She is to be his life-long companion. The wisdom literature took up this idea but is profoundly cynical about marriage, and about women in general. There are praises of faithful and 'silent' wives, but the very praise of them implies their rarity. The most famous passage describes the 'worthy' woman⁴⁸⁸, but even here she is praised mainly for her practical ability, and seems she is so praised both because she is exceptional and because this kind of value is the only justification that could be found for marriage. But the odd story of Tobit, which seems to have emerged among Jews of the Dispersion in the 4th or 5th century BC, is evidence of a quite different attitude to marriage. Tobias' marriage is arranged by God as reward for the patience and piety of his father, and of his father's kinsman Raguel, whose daughter he marries⁴⁸⁹. This is a marriage between Jews, and the implication is that Sarah's previous husbands, who were killed by a devil before they could consummate the marriage, died because they married for wrong motives - that is they were not good Jews⁴⁹⁰. So this one is a religious marriage, and very consciously so. Tobias and his bride pray together before they lie down on their bridal night⁴⁹¹.

From that time onwards, marriage for Jews became an explicitly religious act, directed to God's service and under his protection. For Sarah's housekeeping abilities are not mentioned, but only her piety and her loyalty to her husband⁴⁹². It is clear that for a marriage to be holy it is not enough for the couple to belong to God's people by physical generation;

⁴⁸⁶ Gen. 2:18, 23ff: 5:1-2.

⁴⁸⁷ Cf. Rahner, K., *Op. cit.* p.906.

⁴⁸⁸ Proverbs 31:10-31.

⁴⁸⁹ Tobit 7: 13-18.

⁴⁹⁰ Tobit 3:7-9.

⁴⁹¹ Tobit 8:6-7.

⁴⁹² Tobit 3:16.

they must belong to him in their hearts. This marriage is what St. Paul called 'in the Lord'⁴⁹³, and it is now clear that this is a matter of religious intention, as well as secular institution.

4.4 Marriage in the New Testament

The foregoing Old Testament background information forms the groundwork on which the New Testament teaching on marriage was built. From the point of view of the development of a theology of marriage, the period of the public life of Jesus and the very early apostolic period is not important, because the early revelation created the setting for the re-discovery of marriage as a Christian thing, but did not contribute very much explicitly as the Old Testament did show. Researches show that for the very first Christians, as for the followers of Jesus during his public life, marriage did not appear as a matter of theological speculation, because their lives, married or not, were caught up into a new reality transcending domestic concerns⁴⁹⁴. Thus, though the new faith affected the relationship between married Christians- sometimes by virtually breaking up the marriage in the interests of the apostolate, but no doubt also in more positive ways in many cases⁴⁹⁵ - it was not until the Churches were fairly well established that Christians began to ask questions about the status of marriage in the new dispensation.

Marriage among the Gentile converts already had a traditional pattern and social status, which the leaders of the local Churches saw no reason to alter unless it obviously conflicted with the kind of life demanded by the Gospel. The marriage customs among the Jews, Greeks, Romans, and every other people, provided the marriage forms for Christians as well⁴⁹⁶. Doubtless the blessing of a bishop or presbyter either during the ceremonies or

⁴⁹³ Ephesians 5:22.

⁴⁹⁴ For the very first Christians, the spread of the good news of Christ's death and resurrection took precedence over domesticated concerns. Cf. Haughton, R., *Op. cit.* p.39; Rahner, K., *Op. cit.* p.907; Mackin, T., S.J., *Op. cit.* p.41.

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. Fiorenza, F.S., & Garvin, J.P., *Op. cit.* p.635; Luke 18:29.

⁴⁹⁶ Hastings, A., Christian Marriage in Africa, *Op. cit.* p.65; Haughton, R., *Op. cit.* p.40.

afterwards was greatly valued, but it was certainly not thought to be necessary or, probably, even a regular part of the procedure. Wedding was a family, civil or secular matter⁴⁹⁷.

However, the marriage customs of the Roman world had in earlier centuries been explicitly and truly religious, so that the wife, entering her husband's home, was in fact coming under the rule of his household gods. Both the religion and the ethics of the older Greek and Roman world had been family-centred, and marriage was an important religious act of initiation into her new 'religion' which she would help to perpetuate by giving birth to children who would belong to it.

From the 4th century the priestly blessing of marriage began to take on a more regular form and slowly over the following period, both in east and west, the marriage liturgy developed. For several hundred years, however, this liturgy did not include anything which could be regarded as the wedding as such, but was rather a body of post-wedding blessings, together with nuptial references inserted into the eucharistic celebration. They presupposed that the wedding itself had already taken place. This is borne out of St. Chrysostom's sermon in the 4th century where he urged that the clergy be invited to the party in the place of the customary pagan singers and dancers, in order that marriage begin in seriousness and holiness⁴⁹⁸. At Chrysostom's time in the 4th century AD, the practical problems arising for Christian life in a pagan society were the primary concern of Chrysostom. By the time it was the normal thing to be Christian, what had once been traditional pagan customs were accepted as part of Christian ritual. Therefore marriage was becoming something for the Church to regulate as its own concern, not simply as a given state in which the spiritual welfare of Christians must be cared for.

But by this time the surviving Old Testament theology of the married state which the Church had taken over, plus the New Testament clarity of the ban on divorce, was being brought into question by the pressures of doctrines which were in no way originally Christian but which had taken strong hold on the imagination of many Christians⁴⁹⁹.

⁴⁹⁷ Hastings, A., *Op. cit.* p.65.

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. Roth, C.P., & Anderson, D., St. John Chrysostom On Marriage and Family Life, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986, p.12.

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. Schleck, C.A., C.S.C., The Sacrament of Matrimony, Milwaukee: The Bruce Pub. Coy., 1964, p.52; Rahner, K., *Op. cit.* p.909; Mackin, T., S.J., *Op. cit.* p.80ff; Hastings, A., *Op. cit.* p.66; Haughton, R., *Op. cit.* p.41.

4.5 Marriage from the Church Fathers

It is impossible to consider the development of the theology of marriage in the Western Church without considering the Romance movement, and the Cartharist heresy which was associated with it in so many ways.

The Romance movement view saw the real bond between man and woman as one of love only. It rejected marriage as a debased commercial affair, made worse by the hypocritical blessing of worldly-minded bishops⁵⁰⁰. The extreme Romance doctrines put their emphasis on unconsummated love, the fervent and faithful service of the lady by her lover, in spite of ill-treatment. But the Romance poets also celebrated illicit passion, and some of the most beautiful show very clearly the human need to give and to sacrifice freely⁵⁰¹.

In order to understand the positive aspects of this movement, and its relation to the growth of the theology of marriage, we have to rid our minds of the later understanding of marriage as a loving union, freely undertaken. Up to the 12th and 13th centuries, marriage did not look like that, and to the sensitive and ardent it seemed an impossible setting for love, which could only flourish clandestinely. Catharism rejected sex as evil, but the Romance doctrines, which were closely allied to it, and which rejected lust as the greatest sin against love, by doing so gave great emphasis to the spiritual nature of true love between man and woman⁵⁰². In this roundabout way the Christian understanding of the spiritual stature of sexual love in marriage made a come-back.

So it is less surprising to discover that the medieval Church, whose prevailing mood was so unfavourable to any understanding of sexuality as a means of holiness even in marriage, did in fact produce some very full and delicately balanced studies of marriage as God's work, side by side with the puritanical denunciations, the sex-obsessed manuals for confessors, and the exaltation of virginity for negative rather than positive reasons. But the more positively Christian view of virginity was one of the strands that went to make up the development of the theology of marriage during the period from the 11th and 13th centuries. During this period sacramental theology saw its great development, and this formed another strand in the new and increasingly positive theological view of marriage. A third strand was the study of the implications of the actual liturgy of marriage.

⁵⁰⁰ Haughton, R., *Op. cit.* p.41.

⁵⁰¹ Mackin, T., *Op. cit.*

⁵⁰² Haughton, R., *Op. cit.* p.43.

4.5.1 Marriage and Virginity

Schillebeeckx studies at length the relationship between Catholic thought on marriage and on virginity, and notices the link between the veiling of the virgin as a sign of her setting apart as consecrated to Christ, and the veiling of the bride as a sign of her consecration to her husband in a marriage which is a sacred sign of Christ's union with his Church⁵⁰³. The veiling of the bride had once been a veiling of both bride and bridegroom, as a sign of blessing and dedication⁵⁰⁴. The nuptial liturgy was, as we have seen, not obligatory for Christians for some time, but the custom of veiling and blessing the bride separately became normal, when a liturgical celebration did take place, from about the 4th century onwards. The nuptial liturgy was reserved for lower orders of the clergy and for those of certain lay-people whose conduct was beyond reproach⁵⁰⁵.

This shows why the consideration of the Christian nature of marriage was able to consider the blessing as a clearly religious act, and one which could validly be compared with the religious consecration of virgins. Later when a religious and liturgical form for marriage became obligatory for validity, the theological speculations that had grown from the veiling ceremony could be applied to all marriages, with not altogether happy results. But the contribution to the theology of marriage of thought arising from this comparison with the veiling of virgins was immensely valuable. Schillebeeckx thus puts it:

"The same liturgical action - that of veiling to the accompaniment of prayer - was performed both in the case of the bride of Christ and in the case of the bride of the man. The two were linked by the symbolism of the mystery of the unity between Christ and the Church, although a hierarchical distinction was made between them as suggested by St. Paul. It is clear from this complementary juxtaposition of marriage and virginity that virginity is an exclusively 'other-worldly' reality without any secular significance as such, but that marriage is a secular reality, already meaningful in itself, but raised by the Church's blessing of the bride or of the marriage itself to the level of a supernaturally meaningful reality. It was in the light of the veiling of virgins that the Church became explicitly aware of the separately religious, 'sacramental' nature of marriage - the discovery of marriage as a sacrament

⁵⁰³ Schillebeeckx, E., 'Marriage in the History of the Church' in Marriage, Secular Reality and Sacred Mystery, Sheed and Ward, 1965, p.96.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

was made in the Church in the light of 'virginity for the sake of the kingdom of God',⁵⁰⁶.

4.5.2 Marriage as a Sacrament

From the 11th century onwards there had been discussions among theologians about the concept of sacrament, and by the middle of the 12th century the word had come to be applied in a special way to the seven 'sacred signs' which vitally affect the Christian life, but the difficulty over perceiving a saving effect in a human act involving sex created a kind of 'block' to the recognition of the sacrament of marriage as more than purely a sign of Christ's union with his Church. It seems as if there was an 'instinctive' feeling in the Church that marriage must have a grace-giving power, but this bit of 'inspired guess-work' was prevented for a while from finding full theological recognition because of the strong and ancient tradition of suspicion of sex.

The most radical attack was directed towards the sacramental nature of marriage. Martin Luther was said to have affirmed that "it is nowhere written that he who takes a wife receives the grace of God"⁵⁰⁷. Luther believed that the idea had no scriptural basis and that the Church was wrong in declaring it to be in the same category as the other sacraments⁵⁰⁸. Calvin also refused this idea of sacramentality:

"Lastly there is matrimony, which all admit was instituted by God though no one before the time of Gregory regarded it as a sacrament. What man in his sober senses could so regard it? God's ordinance is good and holy; so also are agriculture, architecture, shoemaking, hair-cutting, legitimate ordinances of God, but they are not sacraments"⁵⁰⁹.

⁵⁰⁶ Op. cit. pp.101-107.

⁵⁰⁷ Dominian, J., Christian Marriage, London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1977 ed., p.81.

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. Dominian, J., Op. cit. p.81; Haughton, R., Op. cit. p.46; Onyeocha, A.E., Family Apostolate in Igboland, Rome, 1983, p.57.

⁵⁰⁹ Institutiones, IV, XIX, quoted from Onyeocha, A.E., Op. cit. p. 57.

Between 1145 and 1155, the Albigensian heretics regarded marriage as a sacrament of Satan. They contended that by entering marriage, Christians made a pact with Satan to perpetuate by way of procreation the imprisonment of the soul in the flesh⁵¹⁰.

These denials brought forth an unequivocal denunciation by the Council of Trent, which declared anyone denying the grace-giving or sacramental nature of marriage anathema⁵¹¹.

This teaching was re-echoed by Canon Law which states that:

“Christ our Lord raised the actual marriage contract between baptised persons to the dignity of a sacrament”⁵¹².

The Popes also have all through the ages restated, emphasised or clarified for modern person and society the sacramentality of the marriage of Christians. For example, Pius XI in *Casti Connubi* states:

“For Christians, Sacrament is not an empty name. Christ our Lord, who established and made effective the holy sacraments, raised the marriage of his faithful ones to be a true and proper sacrament and made it the sign and effective source of that special interior grace by which it perfects natural love, strengthens indissoluble unity and sanctifies the partners. Since Christ himself made valid consent between the partners a sign of grace, Sacrament and Christian marriage are so intimately joined that there can be no true marriage contract between baptised people which is not a sacrament”⁵¹³.

This encyclical according to Kerns is in fact a landmark as far as its doctrine on marriage is concerned. It is moreover particular in its treatment of the sacramental grace of matrimony. Moralists and Canon Lawyers did promote the sacramentality of marriage⁵¹⁴.

⁵¹⁰ Onyeocha, A.E., Op. cit. 57.

⁵¹¹ Dominian, J., Op. cit. p.81.

⁵¹² Canon 1012, or Canon 1055/2 of the New Code of 1983.

⁵¹³ Pius XI, Encyclical Letter, *Casti Connubi*, 31/12/1938, AAS, 22(1930) 548-549.

⁵¹⁴ Kerns, J.E., *The Theology of Marriage*, New York, 1965, p.40.

One other important area of polemics in the theology of marriage as a sacrament was where precisely the sacramental quality of marriage resided. This debate had begun before the full sacramental quality of marriage had been recognized, at a stage when the sacrament was understood purely as a sign. Did it reside in the priestly blessing given to the couple? was the first act of intercourse the matter of the sacrament? Or the exchange of consent? In the West, opinion finally settled in favour of the exchange of consent as the moment when the sacrament was given, in which case the ministers of the sacrament were the woman and the man, not the priest who blessed the union⁵¹⁵. This has continued to be the constant teaching of the Western Church, and Catholics have learnt to take it for granted. But theological developments do not take place in a vacuum as we have seen so far.

In the West this intense interest in the precise 'locus' of the sacrament is all part of a tendency in the Church to try to define precisely, and generally organise moral and liturgical matters minutely. Catholics are so accustomed to this that it seems normal, but a comparison with the development of Christianity in the Eastern tradition shows that it is by no means inevitable. The Western obsession with legally-precise definitions occurred partly because the Western Church was the direct descendant of the Roman system of law⁵¹⁶. When the barbarian invasions uprooted the remnants of Roman culture the Church preserved not only the Roman language and culture, in a more or less debased form, but also the Roman system of law and - more importantly - the Roman legal mentality that went with it⁵¹⁷. And when the various Kingdoms began to sort themselves out the Church was still there, with a ready-made system of territorial administration, with concepts of right and justice and at least a skeleton of legal machinery to apply them with. This is the reason why, in the end, the Church provided not only the liturgical blessing for marriage, but also the customs and laws - a curious mixture of surviving secular customs with religious accretions - according to which marriage was celebrated.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Mackin, T., S.J., *Op. cit.* p. 189.

⁵¹⁶ Cf. Walton, F.P., A Handbook of Husband and Wife According to the Law of Scotland, Edinburgh: W. Green & Son Ltd., 1922, 2nd. ed. p.3; Passingham, B., Law and Practice in Matrimonial Causes, 2nd. ed., London: Butterworths, 1974, especially Ch. 1.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The theological development of this sacrament is continued by the Second Vatican Council, which sees marriage as a sacrament because, “authentic married love is caught up into divine love and because marriage has its mission to manifest to all men the Saviour’s living presence in the world and the genuine nature of the Church”⁵¹⁸. The Vatican II Council therefore affirmed that marriage:

“is a participation in that covenant or a sharing in the partnership of love between Christ and the Church”⁵¹⁹.

The doctrine of Vatican II is re-emphasised by the *Humanae Vitae* of Paul VI. According to this document:

“For baptised people, moreover, marriage invests a dignity of a sacramental sign of grace, in as much as it represents the union of Christ and of the Church”⁵²⁰.

John Paul II equally lends weight to the sacramentality of marriage in his encyclical *Familiaris Consortio*. In it he summarises the sacramentality of marriage thus:

“Receiving and meditating faithfully on the word of God, the Church has solemnly taught and continues to teach that the marriage of the baptised is one of the seven sacraments of the New Covenant. Indeed by means of baptism, man and woman are definitely placed within the new and eternal covenant in the spousal covenant of Christ with the Church.....Their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church”⁵²¹.

In the logic of Incarnation, there is no dichotomy between marriage as a sacrament and marriage as a human reality. The community of love which constitutes the couple is

⁵¹⁸ Cf. G.S., No.48.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid. No.48.

⁵²⁰ Paul VI, Encyclical Letter, *Humanae Vitae*, 8/7/1968, No.8.

⁵²¹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, No.13. The New Code, 1983, reaffirms this teaching; Cf. Canon 1055/2.

called to become for them the sign and sacrament of the faithful and fruitful love which unites Christ with his Church.

4.6 *Wrong Turnings in the Teachings of Church on Marriage*

There are two main directions in which Christian thought on marriage has wandered from the truth, sometimes a long way, sometimes only a little. They can be called, for convenience, the way of spiritualism, and of legalism⁵²².

4.6.1 Spiritualism

The spiritualism of the Church's treatment of the sacrament of marriage in this sense means the tendency to see holiness as essentially divorced from the physical. In connection with marriage it might be summed up as the doctrine that 'good sex is no sex'. This idea about sex began to affect the Church very soon after its beginning, and has been around ever since, sometimes more, sometimes less. In its extreme doctrinal form it has always been condemned by the Church, but a cultural influence as strong as this one is not easily opposed, and in practice it influenced everyone, orthodox as well as heretic, and established itself firmly at the heart of Christian spirituality in the West.

The East, after the initial impact of doctrines which actually originated in the Balkans, was less influenced by it, but possibly the difference is due less to any positive effort to resist it than to the stabilising influence of local customs whose origins were secular, and on which later theologians built, and also to the comparative slowness of social change. While in the West, the violent and radical nature of the social changes which took place between the 5th and 13th centuries virtually destroyed ancient cultures and customs⁵²³. The Church, as we have seen, necessarily became the guardian of culture and law, but the culturally-rootless condition of most of the population made people very vulnerable to extremist doctrines. This happens because in periods lacking a sense of tradition and stability there is nothing against which to measure new ideals and philosophies or religious doctrines, while at the same time people desperately need something to hold on to. In the cultural vacuum they seize on any strong and coherent doctrine which makes sense of life. It seems likely that this is the reason for the

⁵²² Cf. Haughton developed this idea in her treatment of the theology of marriage in relation with the living experience of the married. See. Haughton, R., *Op. cit.* pp.56ff.

⁵²³ Cf. Mackin, T., *Op. cit.* p.192ff.

extraordinary popularity of the gnostic-type doctrines, for they were popular, and not confined to the debates of scholars. The idea that the true human reality is a spiritual one, imprisoned in the physical body but destined, in the enlightened, to be set free by death, was very active and indeed, still attracts many people⁵²⁴.

For example, the case of St. Augustine is interesting, because it shows the effect of a deviant theology on feelings and behaviour. Augustine was never able to accept his own sexuality, even after his conversion, and his doctrine as a Catholic shows a struggle between the desire to assert the orthodox position that marriage is an honourable state, and the ingrained feeling that sex is evil and degrading⁵²⁵. His teaching reflects his personal history, but his personal history is the result of the culture he lived in, one strongly influenced by gnostic ideas, whether or not they were explicitly accepted in doctrinal form.

The anti-physical doctrines of the heretics force the Church to assert explicitly the Christian status of marriage, and the licitness of sex within marriage. Most theologians, however, held that it was only licit with the intention of procreation, and were deeply suspicious of the pleasure attached to sexual intercourse. This gnostic view had a long-term influence on the theology of marriage. One effect was that a revulsion from sex gradually became the required mark of true piety and 'modesty' in a woman meant a dislike of sex, even in lawful wedlock with a man she loved.

4.6.2 Legalism

However, the Church recognised her mistake in this teaching and consequently set out to correct the error. Medieval theologians like Aquinas set out to modify Augustine's view on sexual passion, and they indeed formulated the position that a deliberate, intended, and anticipated enjoyment of sex was right and proper. The essential link between sex and procreation, however, was maintained⁵²⁶. This conjunction was necessary because it had a ring of truth about it. There was no status accorded to women and their inner world, and no

⁵²⁴ This belief is very pronounced today among some of the Pentecostal Churches. Sex to them is regarded as evil and degrading.

⁵²⁵ Mackin, T., Op. cit. pp.127ff.

⁵²⁶ Cf. Dominian, J., Passionate and Compassionate Love: A Vision For Christian Marriage, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1991, p.90; Haughton, R., Op. cit. p.62.

connection was made with human love. Attempts were made sporadically in the Middle Ages to link love with sex, but they did not grip formal theology, although no one knows in detail how married people experienced sex. We know however, in the case of Abelard and Heloise that a strong emotional attachment was to be found in their relationship⁵²⁷.

So the ecclesiastical legalists, seeking to avoid abuses, stuck firmly to the body as the obvious sphere for marital legislation. Marriage as a contract is about the exchange of the right to physical intercourse, leading to the procreation of children. The marriage is 'consummated' when intercourse has taken place. Since the genital organs are involved, and since they are obviously intended by nature for procreation, this natural purpose is easy to identify as the principal purpose of marriage itself. This approach seems so simple and obvious that it is not surprising that it offered an almost unavoidable temptation to theologians in a tradition which was obliged to think in terms of legislation. The temptation was to simplify the immense difficulties of guiding so basic and yet complex a human institution as marriage by taking scriptural precepts and using them as laws, in the sense that the Romans used laws, and then applying these laws, as laws must be applied, in terms of clearly ascertainable physical facts. This of course had its flaws. For example, the number of attempts (successful or not) to get round the Church's marriage regulations shows how necessary it was, but the legacy of one-plane thinking on matrimonial matters has had unfortunate effects on the theology of marriage in the Western Church, and has caused an amount of misery to innocent people which cannot be calculated but whose existence is all too well documented. As Denis O'Callaghan put it in an article in the 'Clergy Review':

"A purely contractual notion of marriage and of the sexual as a matter of legal rights and duties is very convenient for the canonist, but is totally defective as a basis for a theology of marriage"⁵²⁸.

⁵²⁷ There is a short treatise on marriage in the *Supplementum Summae Theologiae* bearing Aquinas' name. But this is no more than Reynaldo of Piperno's adaptation of the material in Thomas' Commentary on the Sentences arranged according to the method of the *Summa*, and published after Thomas' death along with the rest of the *Supplementum*.

⁵²⁸ O'Callaghan, D., *The Clergy Review*, London, Nov.1966, p.839.

This idea was equally echoed by Enda M^cDonagh in a foreword to Jack Dominian's book: "Christian Marriage":

"The biblical and sacramental dimensions of marriage are accessible to the priest-theologians of the Western Church. The experiential, living dimension is not. And without this experiential, living dimension there can be no satisfying theology of marriage"⁵²⁹.

This is some measure of the hold which a legalist approach had on Catholic thinking. The agonies and efforts needed to re-think the basis for a theology of marriage may be difficult to appreciate for people who have grown up to regard it almost as a cliché that love is the basis of marriage. For a long time, mechanistic and legalistic framework of thought spoiled real and sustained efforts to re-think the theology of marriage. The Church's law of marriage was made to defend and support the married state. In the end it became a spider's web in which human flies struggled hopelessly, becoming more enmeshed at every effort. The records of cases of ordinary couples who asked for help from canon-lawyers when things went wrong are often so appalling that it is easy to allow indignation and compassion to obscure the real trouble. The trouble is not the canonists, who are often anguished by their inability to produce a human solution out of the ancient legalisms, but simply the long tradition of non-human mechanistic thinking about human behaviour, especially human sexual behaviour. This tendency is still very much with the Church today. In our interview with the Catholic Yoruba couples, this fear of a legalistic approach to issues of marriage came up strongly and this has affected and is still affecting the number of Church weddings. According to the Yoruba understanding of Church wedding, it is a "white" wedding and as such a Church wedding is never an alternative to the traditional Yoruba wedding. It is only an addition. For the Yoruba as we saw in the last chapter, marriage is a long drawn-out process culminating in the handing-over ceremony and not in the actual intercourse.

In a recent article in the Catholic Life Magazine, there are still very many priests according to Fr. George Lyons whose instinct is to be heavy-handed in their judgement, and miserly with their sympathy when confronted with people whose marriages are in trouble. In

⁵²⁹ Dominian, J., *Christian Marriage*, Op. cit. p. viii. This is a foreword to the book written by Enda McDonagh, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

his words: "There are still priests who tend to think that because you are in that situation you are inevitably at fault"⁵³⁰.

However, the official teaching of the Church on marriage has realised the wrong turning taken and has tried to soften its legalistic approach to marriage today. The present trend, however, is not excessive but mainly a reaction against past prudery.

Vatican II refurbished a lot of the ideas of the past. When John XXIII decided to call a general ecumenical Council in 1963, he was moved by the tumultuous disunity among Christians and the spiritual disorientation of the world at large. The theme of the Council as far as he was concerned was to be "unity and the world". As such, the council devoted a whole section to a Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). In the document that ensued, the council sought to analyse and evaluate Church doctrine as confronted with the current social change in the world of today, with a view to offering ecclesiastical solutions where the problems call for a pastoral review. The "most burning problem of our time", the council realised after its first session, was "Marriage and Family", a problem that could not be ignored⁵³¹.

Gaudium et Spes was divided into two parts, and the first chapter of part two is exclusively given to marriage and family. Faced with the reality of social changes that demonstrated a different outlook on love, sexuality and the value of the family, it rejected as inoperative the proposals contained in a scheme on "Marriage, Family and Chastity", which had been presented to the bishops before the council. This document was nothing more than a restatement of the traditional teaching with all its legalistic rigidity. The rejection of this approach already signalled an openness of mind that indicated a genuine desire to face the problems of our times with a spirit of evangelization⁵³².

⁵³⁰ Jennifer Smith "Breaking up and Making up and how the Church can help" in Catholic Life, Ireland: Gabriel Communications, No.18, May 1996, pp.12-13.

⁵³¹ B., Haring, "Some Problems of Special Urgency", in H., Vorgrimler (ed.) Commentary on the Document of Vatican II, pp. 225-245, attention p.225.

⁵³² Kambasaya, T., "Canonical Legislation and Juridical and Pastoral Problems of Childless Marriage in Customary Maiduguri", Dissertation for the Doctorate in Canon Law, Urban University, Rome, 1985, p.67.

The debate that followed showed an inclination towards a new vision of the marriage doctrine, reviewing in particular the intrinsic values of marriage and conjugal love, relegating it to a “purely secondary, non-essential purpose and benefit of marriage”⁵³³.

By the time of Vatican council, it was obvious that the personalistic approach had so strongly gained attention that it forced its way into the thinking of the council fathers. Vatican II noticeably diverted from the traditional insistence on procreation and nurture of children as the primary end of marriage to favour the more progressive view. While the council stated that marriage is the work of God and endowed “with various benefits and with various ends in view”⁵³⁴, it did not specify what these ends are or what the order they follow is. The Church avoided tipping the balance by eliminating a hierarchy of ends in marriage, no longer as an instrument of generation mainly, but as “an intimate partnership of life and love which constitutes the married state established by the Creator and endowed by him with his own proper laws. It is rooted in the contract of its partners, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent...and confirmed by divine law...and by its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of offspring”⁵³⁵. She did not devalue children as an important aspect of marriage, but rather refocused her view to put them and mutual love in the same perspective.

On the constitution of marriage, the council reaffirmed the conjugal pact, that is, the irrevocable personal consent that establishes the community of life and conjugal love as essential. Thus, the unique importance of the family lived as a community of love is that it manifests Christ as God who is love in the world:

“Thus the Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ and the Church, and as a participation in that covenant, will manifest to all men the Saviour’s living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. This family will do so by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all members of the family work together”⁵³⁶.

⁵³³ Haring, B., *Op. cit.* p.234.

⁵³⁴ G.S. 1025-1126, n.48.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ Pastoral Constitution, Part 2, Ch. 1.

In these few passages, the Roman Catholic Church placed marriage squarely in the realm of personal love, and strongly influenced by its biblical tradition, sees the love as portraying Christ's love and ultimately the foundation of our faith. Thus human love becomes the means of exploring divine love.

4.6.2.1 *The Phenomenon of Inter-Church Marriage*

It is pertinent to discuss briefly here the Catholic Church Code of Canon Law on "Mixed Marriages"⁵³⁷.

Another area of the Church's wrong turning was the question of "Inter-Church marriages". With Christianity's 4th century ascendancy as the imperial religion, the Church began to exercise legal responsibilities in regard to marriage. With the abuses such as clandestine marriages that crept in by the medieval period a lot of loopholes were opened which needed a remarkably ingenious solution. A solution to such abuses came with the Council of Trent's decree *Tametsi* obligating Roman Catholics from that point in time to exchange consent in the presence of the priest and two or three witnesses for a valid marriage. According to Alasdair Heron⁵³⁸, "The presence of the priest and witnesses does not of itself make or add anything to the actual marriage; rather, it is a *precondition* without which the exchange of consent cannot take place". This became known as the "canonical form", the manner in which marriage, according to the laws of the Roman Catholic Church, would be expected to take place. The intent was to place marriage in a social and faith context of the gathered community of faith. The effect, however, in Heron's words, was to cast the Roman Catholic Church's pastoral concern in legal form, to emphasize control rather than care⁵³⁹.

A subtle implication of the 16th century decree *Tametsi* was the failure of the Catholic Church to recognize Protestant marriages as valid, sacramental unions. What was to be said for those Protestants who "converted" (in the language of the times) to Roman Catholicism after their marriage? The historical plot thickened because of European idiosyncrasies. For example, the Netherlands implemented the conciliar decree under Spanish rule as a Roman Catholic country. But when the Netherlands became independent and Protestant, inter-church

⁵³⁷ Chapter Six of the 1983 New Code of Canon Law, Canons 1124-1129 talk on the laws guiding mixed marriages.

⁵³⁸ Heron, A., *Two Churches-One Love*, Dublin: APCK, 1977, p.31.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

marriages became commonplace. To complicate matters, Protestants appealed to have former marriages annulled on the grounds that they had not observed proper canonical form, i.e. marriage before a priest and witnesses. This prompted Pope Benedict XIV to issue the declaration known as *Benedictina*. In it he ruled that Protestant and inter-church marriages in the Netherlands were valid even if the canonical form had not been observed. Thus, "*Tametsi*" applied only to marriages between Roman Catholics.

A more tightening decree *Ne Temere* was again introduced in 1908 that determined the issue of "canonical form" as a requirement for valid marriage. The substance of this decree made the canonical form binding for the whole world of all marriages involving a Roman Catholic, but not for any other marriage. This decree "*Ne Temere*" is often thought to have been chiefly concerned to impose restrictions on inter-church marriage; but in fact it did so only indirectly. Its real aim was to standardize the regulations for all Roman Catholic marriages. But of course, in areas where "*Tametsi*" had either never come into force, or subsequently been relaxed by the provisions of the *Benedictina*, *Ne Temere* imposed fresh and stricter rules on inter-church marriages than those which had previously operated.

The Church laws oblige a Roman Catholic to exchange his or her vows before the authorized Catholic ordained minister (bishop, priest, deacon) or lay minister (if authorized). Every person seeking marriage in the Catholic Church is required to secure a copy of his or her baptismal certificate, ordinarily issued within the last six months. A similar proof of baptism is needed from the non-Catholic Christian. This process relates to the definition of marriage as a sacrament expressed through the vowed commitment by two baptised persons. It also serves to defend the bond of marriage by recording in the baptismal records any sacramental marriages a person covenants.

These laws have devastating effects in a lot of inter-church families. According to Kilcourse, "when the oral history of the modern ecumenical movement is recorded, a special volume needs to be reserved for the saga of 19th and 20th century inter-church couples who weathered dehumanizing, often offensive, and indifferent pastoral practices associated with the Roman Catholic Church's "promises" required of spouses in a "mixed marriage"⁵⁴⁰. For example, the Church, in an attempt to dissuade a couple from marriage, required that both the Roman Catholic party and the spouse from the other church sign a promise that all children of the marriage would be baptized and raised as Roman Catholics. The church grudgingly

⁵⁴⁰ Kilcourse, G., Op. cit. p.38.

resorted to perfunctory parlour weddings, denying the marriage party the celebration of the sacrament in the church's worship space. The indignities remembered and narrated by faith-filled wives and husbands from other churches are invariably juxtaposed with an appreciation of the change in official Roman Catholic Church attitudes⁵⁴¹. Putting into context the root cause of these deeper, unresolved sources of the promises, Heron opined:

“The basic cause of the inter-church marriage situation does not lie in the fact that members of one church may marry members of another. It lies in the fact that the churches are divided from each other in the first place. Were there no such divisions, then inter-church marriage would not exist...It is inter-church division which is the root cause of inter-church marriage”⁵⁴².

This means that it is superficial and unjust for people to talk, as if it were the fault of the inter-church couple themselves that they have these problems to face. They are in fact victims of a situation they did not themselves create. The thing which is really wrong, the fundamental anomaly, is not that a Roman Catholic and a Protestant should get married, but that the churches should be so separated from each other that marriages across the divide run into difficulties.

In the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), “The Decree on Ecumenism”⁵⁴³ introduced new understandings of the ecclesial identity of other baptized Christians, as discussed under “dispensations”. The Roman Catholic promises, if unilaterally forced, could compromise the responsibility and freedom of the other Christian spouse in the marriage. It recognizes that the spouse has an equivalent freedom and responsibility to participate and contribute just as conscientiously as the Roman Catholic to the children's religious education and faith formation.

⁵⁴¹Mrs. Adekoya, an informant left the Roman Catholic fold because of the harsh treatment she and her family received from the Parish pastor years ago when she married. The simplest reason for such treatment according to her was that her fiancé is a non-Catholic Christian.

⁵⁴² Heron, A., Op. cit.

⁵⁴³ Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 21st Nov. 1964, pp. 452-560., Austin Flannery Conciliar and Post-Conciliar edition.

The current canon law in this section has been inspired too on religious freedom. The legislator here again upholds both old and new values in a delicate balance⁵⁴⁴. The law leaves much room to the discretion of the couple. In this section, the freedom of every person to choose his or her spouse⁵⁴⁵ is implicit and the issue of the Catholic education of the children is so prudently handled that it does not make a marriage impossible. We further note here that peace among the spouses can be more important than the specifically Catholic education of the children. The Catholic party still has a duty to communicate the faith to the children but not without taking other values into account. The spouses are therefore expected to jointly make the correct judgement about their family without bringing the peace and harmony of the marriage into peril. These official judgements are cautiously ecumenical and the laws are no longer rigid, their effectiveness hangs on the co-operation of the spouses themselves.

4.7 A Critical Reflection on the Validity and Significance of Canon Law

Even though canonists have at intervals denied that a formal definition of marriage has ever been written in Catholic law, there is no denying that at intervals exact though informal definitions have been proposed. When saying marriage is a contract, canonists from the 12th to the 20th centuries implied that it is a species of the genus "human relationship". When naming marriage's ends and its contractual good-to-be-exchanged they identified a sub-section of this species.

We shall look at the provisions of Canon Law that are the official regulations according to which members are married.

First, we look at the covenant aspect as stipulated in Canons 1055⁵⁴⁶, that marital consent is an act of the will by which a man and woman give themselves and accept one another in an irrevocable covenant in order to create a marriage. This stipulates a consciousness of what marriage entails as scheduled and taught by the Church in its catechism and marriage course.

⁵⁴⁴ Akpan, E.A., "Problems of Christian Marriage and Family Life in the Nigerian Situation" in Etafo et al., (ed) Marriage and the Family in Nigeria, Nigeria: Rex Charles and Patrick Ltd., 1993, p.95.

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. Canon 1058.

⁵⁴⁶ The Code of Canon Law in English translation, London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983, p.189.

There must also be two witnesses. The law demanded for two witnesses whether they are parents or friends and finally that it must be before a priest. Church authority is vested with power to establish that the two are not previously married nor involved in polygamy. Thus bans of marriage are published and clearances obtained.

Christians married under the Church are to cleave to one another and become 'one flesh' as taught by Jesus in the Bible and in dictates of the exhortation by Paul that there should be love from the husband and obedience from the wife⁵⁴⁷.

The significance of Church weddings is not only the sacramental value but the dignity and duties attached which are of utmost importance in the status of marriage. Secondly, a new unit has opened up, to continue the work of salvation both of its own souls and the children given them. Thus this is a mini-Church. The family institution is thus established in compliance with the directives of God and to work for God. This aspect was greatly stressed during the Synod of African Bishops:

"By its very nature marriage, which has the special mission of perpetuating humanity, transcends the couple. In the same way, by its nature, the family extends beyond the individual household: it is oriented towards society. The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself"⁵⁴⁸.

It also signifies the attainment of religious maturity commencing at baptism through reconciliation, Eucharist and matrimony whilst Holy Orders are for those who opted for celibate order.

To return to the question of marriage as covenant, Canon law currently retains the doctrine of the ends of marriage in a new expanded theological framework. This policy is as it should be in so far as the institution of marriage must have a purpose. But, according to Emmanuel Akpan, many traditional legal elements are still to be found in the new thereby creating lack of harmony and cohesion⁵⁴⁹. Frequently the old and the new elements coexist in

⁵⁴⁷ Ephesians Chap. 5:21-33.

⁵⁴⁸ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Op. cit. No.85., p.92.

⁵⁴⁹ Akpan, E.A., "Problems of Christian Marriage and Family Life in the Nigerian situation" in Etafo, B., & Okeke,

an uneasy and precarious balance. Such an example is found in the opening canon (c.1055)⁵⁵⁰ in which the first paragraph projects marriage with a strong initial emphasis as a covenant and in the second paragraph the canon reverts to the contractual terminology that a contract cannot exist without being a sacrament.

Among Yoruba traditional families, the description of marriage as a covenant is very appropriate as has already been made clear in preceding chapters. Covenant (*foedus*) was used in Roman law for agreements which transcended the other ordinary categories of contract. It was used in treaties between nations and peoples, pacts with a religious significance, promises among friends or members of a family without creating strict right-and-duty situations. The term is also biblical. It is eminently suitable for bringing out the sacred dimensions of marriage⁵⁵¹. This biblical and legal understanding of marriage is in complete accord with the mentality of the Yoruba people.

From the point of view of indigenous law and customs, marriage in Yorubaland as treated earlier is primarily regarded as an alliance between two kinship groups and only in a secondary aspect as a union between two individual persons⁵⁵². Marriage as an alliance between two groups of people in the traditional setting in Yorubaland or Nigeria as a whole is better understood if it is viewed as an integral part of the kinship system as a whole. The indigenous custom does not apply the word *contract* (used in canon law) to marriage but prefers another word, “*ebi*”- ‘transactions’⁵⁵³, to express the exchange of reciprocal rights and obligations between two kinship groups and binding those groups together in a relationship which remains effective beyond the lifetime of the original individual spouses.

Furthermore, the Yorubas traditionally see their marriages as essentially rearrangements of a social structure by which interested persons acquired new institutionalized relationships. Briefly, marriage creates new social relations not only between the husband and

H.O., ed. Marriage and Family in Nigeria, Enugu: Otuson Nig. Ltd., 1993, p.81.

⁵⁵⁰ Op.cit. p.189.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., p.82.

⁵⁵² Cotran, E., & Rubin, N., (eds) Readings in African Law, London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1970, in two volumes.

⁵⁵³ This was the exact word used in the observed traditional weddings.

the wife's relatives on the one hand and between the wife and the husband's relatives on the other, but also between the relatives of the husband and those of the wife, who, on the two sides, are interested in the marriage and in the children that are expected to result from the marriage⁵⁵⁴. This principle of continuing relationship is closely connected with the institution of bride-price as earlier discussed. The latter is variously interpreted as being primarily in the nature of compensation to the woman's family for the loss of one of its members, as part of a transaction in which the dominant emphasis is on the formation of an alliance between two kinship groups, as a species of marriage insurance designed to stabilize the marriage and give protection to the wife, and as a symbol or seal on a stable union being formed⁵⁵⁵.

This custom of the Yoruba people (and Nigerians as a whole) about marriage as an institution for rearranging new social relations is wider than the restrictive principle of canon law which regards marriage as a contract that concerns primarily the man and the woman who are forming a union.

4.8 Conclusion

The initial contact of Christianity with Yorubaland and indeed Nigeria during the 15th and 18th centuries was minimal. The second coming of the Christian religion during the 19th and 20th centuries was momentous. The techniques and strategies adopted by the pioneer missionaries during the second coming did the trick. The evangelistic success was phenomenal especially with respect to numbers. The school and medical approaches to evangelization yielded great dividends. Nevertheless, the quality of Christian belief and practice, of understanding and commitment leaves much to be desired. The strategies of conversion and socialization were, in large measure, responsible for many of the defects and deficiencies that exist in the Christian churches. A meaningful programme of dialogue with Yoruba or Nigerian traditional religion and culture can help to bail the Christian religion out of its present malaise. Europe has put chains on African Christians by foisting uncongenial and incompatible religious and social institutions on them. The practice and policy are ill-advised. No amount of cultural interaction or tutelage will ever make Europeans of Black Africans. At best, they can become imitators and "apes". The critical error of Christianity in

⁵⁵⁴ Phillips, A., Survey of African Marriage and Family Life, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953, p.XI-XVII.

⁵⁵⁵ Radcliffe-Brown, A.R., & Ford, D., African Systems of Kinship and Marriage, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950, p.43.

Chapter Four

Africa has been its attempt to transplant Western Christianity to Africa rather than try to become African in Africa. African Christians have to be themselves - Africans not Europeans, Black African Christians, not white European Christians. It is by being themselves that they can feel at home in God's family and contribute their rightful quota to the growth and flowering of the kingdom of God on earth. This is the aim of the next chapter.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: POINTS OF HARMONY AND DISCORD BETWEEN CHRISTIAN/WESTERN AND YORUBA TRADITIONAL MARRIAGES

5.1 *Preamble*

In the words of Nathaniel Ndiokwere, “the survival of Christianity in Africa will largely be determined by the successful “implantation” or inculturation of the Christian faith within the African culture”⁵⁵⁶. Walbert Buhlmann in his own reaction has called for an enfleshed African Christianity. In his contribution, he opined:

“...Following the much more radical precedent of God incarnate, the point is to bring the essential kernel of the gospel as a leaven to Africa and there give it the opportunity to become enfleshed in African culture and so begin a new history in Africa”⁵⁵⁷.

In another of his works, Buhlmann advocates a universal Church that takes on board Christ’s incarnate word in various cultures. According to his conclusion:

“This acceptance of the ‘modern’ ideas does not mean that there is no longer a Catholic identity. Our Church will be the vanguard of the great people of God, the guide that leads humanity towards God, the ‘model’ of the ‘elect’, endowed with the fullness of the word of God and of the sacraments. She will no longer be tempted to set up an ideal state by force of law and legal sanctions, or impose a uniform type of Christianity, or to prove her own pre-eminence on the basis of documentary evidence, or to struggle to defend her own privileges. She will live the life of the Gospel in simplicity and exemplary fidelity, she will try to make life accessible and credible, and will try in this way always and untiringly to act as a stimulus to the other Churches and the other religions. Above all she will believe with unshakeable faith that the risen Lord and his Spirit are with her. Thus she will succeed in finding a meaning hidden behind all apparent absurdity of life, and in giving not only a new dimension to history but a new hope to humanity”⁵⁵⁸.

⁵⁵⁶ Ndiokwere, N.I., Op. cit. p.12.

⁵⁵⁷ Buhlmann, W., The Church of the Future: A Model for the Year 2001, New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, trans. ed. 1986, p.37.

⁵⁵⁸ Buhlmann, W., Forward Church, Slough, England: St. Paul Publications, transl. ed. 1977, pp.82-83.

From our discussion on marriage and family so far, common-sense seems to suggest that the task before the African Church remains that of reconciling the African positive values of marriage and family with that of Christian cultures so that Christian marriage may find a place within the traditional African society and vice-versa. Not to initiate a move to effect such a reconciliation would be to canonize the often-heard allegation that Christianity is a "foreign religion". The document on the Church in the modern world says:

"The Church is not unaware how much it has profited from the history and development of mankind, and from the riches hidden in various cultures...The Church learned early in its history to express the Christian message in concepts and language of different people and tried to clarify it in the light of the wisdom of their philosophers. This was an attempt to adapt the Gospel to the understanding of all men and the requirements of the learned, in so far as this could be done. Indeed this kind of adaptation and preaching...must ever be the law of all evangelization. In this way it is possible to create in every country the possibility of expressing the message of Christ in suitable terms and to foster vital contact and exchange between the Church and different cultures"⁵⁵⁹.

The message above presupposes a reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought-patterns of each people which is based on the conviction that Christ and his Good News are ever-dynamic and challenging to all times and cultures as they become better understood and lived by each people. According to Sofola:

"Culture is a learned pattern of behaviour, ideas and beliefs, and artifacts shared by a people and socially transmitted by them from one generation to another. The modern African's root is deep-down in Africa, these cultural characteristics which are moralistic and essentially human are ingredients, the contents or building-blocks of which his solid African personality is made"⁵⁶⁰.

Sofola's statement confirms the fact that a theology that fails to appeal to the concepts of the African and that does not speak in those concepts would just be out of place. To this, Aylward Shorter observes:

⁵⁵⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*. No.44.

⁵⁶⁰ Sofola, J.A., African Culture and The African Personality, 1973, p.ix. Quoted from Nwanze, J.E., O.P. Op. cit. p.48.

- “i) That the search for African Christian Theology “has to be dialogical” because the topic must take into consideration the religious traditions of non-Christian African.
- ii) That the dialogical discussion calls for descending to great minutiae.
- iii) That the study must be scientific and systematic”⁵⁶¹.

In this chapter, the key themes and issues on the points of conflict between the Yoruba traditionally-held tenets on marriage and Western/Christian are examined as well as the similarities between Yoruba culture and Christian traditions. The pastoral difficulties are equally examined with a view to proposing a liturgical inculturation that may help remedy the present marriage situation. The choice of civil laws by some Christian couples/families in preference to Church doctrines or the Canon law especially when neither culture nor religion support their actions is also examined. Thus both culture and religion contend with secularism in the city person who has become alienated from his roots and distant to the Bible on family and marital issues.

5.2 Similarities

5.2.1 The Universality of Marriage

Both the Church and Yoruba traditional society see marriage as being of its nature a sacred vocation and as such there is need for certain regulations. It is believed in Yoruba societies like other African societies that from the very beginning of human life, God commanded or taught people to get married and bear children. Therefore marriage is looked upon as a sacred duty which every normal person must perform. Lending weight to this statement, Mbiti says:

“Failure to do so means in effect stopping the flow of life through the individual, and hence the diminishing of mankind upon the earth. Anything that deliberately goes towards destruction or obstruction of human life is regarded as wicked and evil”⁵⁶².

⁵⁶¹ Cf. Shorter, A., African Christian Theology-Adaptation or Incarnation?, London: Geoffrey Chapman/Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975.

⁵⁶² Mbiti, J.S., Op. cit. p.98.

The obligation to get married is, therefore, the only means of human survival as far as the views of African peoples are concerned⁵⁶³. For that reason it is a religious obligation. It is as old as human society. Through marriage and child-bearing, human life is preserved, propagated and perpetuated. Through them life is also deepened vertically and spread out horizontally⁵⁶⁴. Marriage and childbearing are the focus of life. They are at the very centre of human existence, just as man is at the very centre of the universe. Therefore anybody who, under normal conditions, refuses to get married, is committing a major offence in the eyes of society and people will be against him. The Yoruba from our observation of their expression have a comical way of expressing this aspect. They say: "*Bibi ni won bi mi, emi na ni lati bi temi*" - 'My parents gave birth to me and as such I must do the same'.

This is equally the belief of the Church. To emphasise further that the sacred character of marriage is inherent in its nature Pope Pius XII says:

"Even among those who are not baptized, legitimately contracted marriage is, in the natural order, a sacred thing"⁵⁶⁵.

Marriage is seen therefore to be the only legitimate means of procreation. It is also considered as a sacrament, a "sign of salvation"⁵⁶⁶. Marriage is the main focus of existence. Asare Opoku asserts that:

"Marriage is such an important stage in African life that elaborate preparations in the form of puberty rites are made before young people enter into it. In the puberty rites, the young are educated in matters of sex, marriage, procreation, family life and the responsibilities of adulthood"⁵⁶⁷.

⁵⁶³ Over 90% of the informants on the field acknowledged this fact as earlier mentioned. They believe that marriage is a necessity for every normal human being.

⁵⁶⁴ Mbiti, J.S., Op. cit. p.100.

⁵⁶⁵ Pius XII, Allocution to the Sacred Roman Rota, Oct. 6th, 1946, AAS 20(1946) pp.421-424.

⁵⁶⁶ Schick, L., "Marriage and Celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven", Theology Digest, Vol.36 No.2, 1989, p.136.

⁵⁶⁷ Opoku, K.A., West African Traditional Religion, Lagos: Fep. International Ltd., 1978, p.124.

Other cultures, Jewish, Gentile, Roman and Anglo-Saxon, have marriage processes and rites⁵⁶⁸. Thus all over the world it is considered a religious duty for man to procreate as this is the only means of sustaining continuity on earth. In all other cultures, marriage is taken seriously as sacred thus families prepared their wards for it and look forward to the offspring to get married to decent wards from other families to perpetuate the family names.

Great pains are taken to “investigate much more thoroughly into the reputation and the genetic background of the family”⁵⁶⁹. Over 80% of our informants believe that there should be enough preparation for marriage by every intending couple and their families. Chief Olubanwo, president of Surulere Magistrate Court among other respondents also added that:

“marriage is one of the common elements in all cultures. It took me a long process to prepare for my own marriage in spite of the support given by the family”⁵⁷⁰.

There is also the fact that married men and women earn special regard as to the marital status.

The pastoral ministry to marriage and the family life has always been in the Church a main concern because of its universality. The Synodal document lent its weight to this factor when it says:

“By its nature marriage, which has the special mission of perpetuating humanity, transcends the couple. In the same way, by its nature, the family extends beyond the individual household: it is oriented towards society. The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself. Thus, far from being closed in on itself, the

⁵⁶⁸ Theodore Mackin has given in detail the developments of marriage processes and rites in the Western world in his book "Marriage in the Catholic Church" - already cited as a secondary source for this work.

⁵⁶⁹ Applbaum, K.D., "Marriage with the Proper Stranger: Arranged Marriage in Metropolitan Japan" in Ethnology, Vol.34, No.1, Winter 1995, p.44.

⁵⁷⁰ Chief Sola Olubanwo, 58, Lagos, 14th April 1995.

family is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society, and undertakes its social role”⁵⁷¹.

Marriage to the Church then forms the basis of the family, which itself is properly regarded as the foundation of all well-ordered society.

5.2.2 The Religious Intent of Marriage

Traditionally for the Yoruba, marriage has a deep religious meaning. It is a means of perpetuating the ancestral name, a means of receiving children from God, and the institution for the legitimate exercise of the divinely given power of sex. The Yoruba, whose notion of worthwhile existence pertains to birth through marriage, say:

*“ohun meta pataki lantoro,
Kagbele aiye kalowo
kagbele aiye kabimo,
kani alaafia eyi tiise baale oro”*⁵⁷².

“We are born for three important things in life,
to live in the world and have wealth,
to live in the world and give birth to children,
to live in the world and have good health, the father of wealth”.

These are the quintessential elements to existence for the Yoruba and the three main features of their cultural-ideas, institutions and material technology, and arrangement of human activities, individually or in a group, reinforce the centrality of these themes.

There is a close religious link between the idea of children, the product of marriage in Yoruba and of the Israel of the Old Testament. Their perception of children is very similar⁵⁷³.

⁵⁷¹ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa, Op. cit. No.85 p.92.

⁵⁷² This saying was collected from Ojogbon Babatunde Oyafemi, an expert on the impact of reading and writing on Yoruba culture.

⁵⁷³ Abe, G.O., has compared the institution of marriage among the Yoruba and that of the Jewish culture. His comparative study has brought to light a lot of similarities between Jewish marriage practices and that of Yoruba culture. Op. cit.

In Yoruba, the first prayer on the lips of all couples is that God would bless their marriage with children. Children for the Israelites too, were a blessing while childlessness denotes a curse⁵⁷⁴.

In Yorubaland, as soon as the child is safely born, the women-folk present announce the event with songs, accompanied with dancing and shrill shouts of joy.

One of the most important family celebrations of the Yoruba people in connection with the birth of a child is the naming ceremony. This ceremony is observed with feasting and great joy. Every Yoruba name has an import. What Stephen Ezeanya observes of *Igbo* names is equally applicable to Yoruba names. According to him:

“For the Igbo people as for the Hebrews, a name is not just a personal label for the sake of identity. It means much more”⁵⁷⁵.

Yoruba names bear family histories and prayers. They are family aspirations and life goals. They are religious and moral norms. They are biblical quotations and maxims.

The names which Yoruba parents give their children are too numerous. It is not easy to categorise them. However, the line of thought traced in Yoruba could be placed under four principal categories⁵⁷⁶: i) Theophoric names - these names assert the belief or trust in God in one form or another; the majority of Yoruba names are in this class today; ii) precatative names - express the wishes of the people for themselves and for their families; iii) corrective names- are addressed to some members of the community and sometimes even to the entire community calling their attention to some vices in the group and asking them to amend their ways; and finally; iv) virtue names- these extol virtues in all forms as known to the Yorubas. Only the theophoric names interest our study.

The Yoruba theophoric names show the people's close relationship with, their awareness of and trust in God. These names express the power or mercy of God, the help expected or received from Him, the feeling of kinship with Him, etc. Some names establish the

⁵⁷⁴ Wright, A., "Wisdom" in R. Brown, *JBC*, 34:1-60, see 34:16.

⁵⁷⁵ Ezeanya, S.N., *A Handbook of Igbo Christian Names*, Port-Harcourt, 1967, p.9.

⁵⁷⁶ Adeyemi, L., "Naming Culture in Yorubaland" in *The Daily Sketch Newspaper*, Nigeria, November 7th 1995, p.5.

existence of God, '*Olorun Mbe*' (God exists), some names are response to God in prayer, '*Modupe Oluwa*' (Thank God), '*Ebun Oluwa*' (God's gift), '*Oluwa-toyin*' (God is to be praised). There are such names as '*Suru*' (Patience), '*Ife*' (Love), '*Ayo*' (Happiness), '*Ibukun*' (Blessing), etc.

Yoruba theophoric names show, in short, the people's awareness of the existence of God, and their complete dependence on Him. They have a common departure - man's life on earth (in the family), lived under the divine observation, among men, who could be good or evil. Whether these names extol virtue or the beauty of human life, or teach the art of living, or ridicule social vices, they have common denomination which is the quest for true family life under the eyes of '*Olorun*' - God.

The Catholic Church does not repudiate the customs and traditions of any people provided they are not evil. This is clear from the declaration of Vatican II on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC):

"Even in Liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather, she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races. Anything in their way of life that is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error, she studies with sympathy and if possible, preserves intact, sometimes, in fact she admits such things into the liturgy as long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit"⁵⁷⁷.

5.2.3 Procreation

This is the primary aim of marriage. People talk of children born in wedlock as legitimate and worthy inheritors and assets. The Marriage Law of Inheritance and Succession give statutory recognition to the position of a man and woman who marry according to Christian marriage. Section 36 of the Marriage Act gives statutory recognition to married status. It provides that:

"Where any person who is subject to native law and custom contracts a marriage in accordance with the provisions of this Act and such person dies intestate, subsequently to the commencement of this Act, leaving a widow or husband or any issue of such marriage; and also where any person who is the issue of any of such marriage as aforesaid dies intestate subsequently to the commencement of this Act. The personal property of such intestate and also the real property shall be distributed in accordance with the provisions of the

⁵⁷⁷ SC. No. 37.

law of England relating to the distribution of the personal estates of the intestate, any native law or custom to the contrary notwithstanding”⁵⁷⁸.

Marriage is regarded as blessed when it bears fruit. As mentioned already, among most African cultures and especially the Yoruba, it is a calamity if a couple is childless. Children are regarded as wealth, they enhance prestige of parents. There is a saying in Yoruba language that “*Omo lade ori igbeyawo*” - ‘children are the crown of marriage’. Mr. Simon Ojo of Ikole-Ekiti, one of our informants, opined:

“Children are of serious advantage to parents especially in old age when you must be catered for”⁵⁷⁹.

Other Christian respondents refer to the psalm like Psalm 103:17. In addition to this, many will prefer male children because most societies practice patrimony. Most respondents to the question on male preference suggested among other reasons that:

“perpetuation and inheritance are the key reasons why the Yoruba marriage lays much importance on the male child”⁵⁸⁰.

We further asked the question “Can a female child be substituted in case of necessity for a male child? The summary of their answers is that “after marriage a woman’s home is in her husband’s house”⁵⁸¹. Thus she forfeits her rights of any thing both material or otherwise in her parents home. How do you see a family of all female children? Again, a synthesis of their views point to the fact that with only females, the family is incomplete. “Such a family has no backbone and support”⁵⁸². Thus it is almost destined to be wiped out since there is no heir to continue the line.

⁵⁷⁸ Elias, T.O., Nigeria: Developments of its Laws and Constitutions, London: Stevens, 1967.

⁵⁷⁹ Simon Ojo, 49, Ikole-Ekiti, April 1995.

⁵⁸⁰ Tape-recorded interview.

⁵⁸¹ Recorded interview from the informants.

⁵⁸² Tape-recorded responses from the interviews.

A childless person is called *agan* (barren) in Yoruba, although there are very few such people as all avenues are explored to ensure that the couple are treated; sacrifices and prayers are offered to entreat God for children.

5.2.4 Ends of Marriage

It has been shown that this is another area of similarity. Marriage is not for procreation alone but for educating the products of the marriage and also the partnership of the couple and to serve as a hallmark of responsibility as the society will not bestow great honour on single people. They cannot take hereditary or traditional titles. In the civil service, they are not vested with great responsibility in view of their single status.

As already noted, men and women who are not celibate are pressurised to marry. "Only five out of the many respondents are considering celibate life outside priesthood"⁵⁸³.

5.2.5 Place of Children

As noted, male children are preferred for socio-economic reasons and in view of the patrilineal system adopted in most societies. Most people responded that "they were born and must also bear children"⁵⁸⁴. While all agreed that children are gifts from God, it is considered as an affliction to be without them. Some concluded by saying not having "*amuwa Olorunni*" - 'is also the will of God'. The family system is so closed up that every member of the family is concerned about the welfare of an aged member. According to Bamidele, parents depend especially on their children for support and protection at old age. He goes on to say: "Children give economic security to their parents and fight for their right and justice"⁵⁸⁵.

It is commonly said among the Yoruba "*Omo ni iyi, omo ni ide*" - 'children are prestige, children are jewels'. The weight of the situation is summarised by Papal consolation:

"I know that in your country the childless couple bears a heavy cross, one that has to be born with courage all through life. To couples who cannot have children of their own, I say you are not less-loved by God; your love for each other is complete and fruitful when it is open to other, to the needs of the

⁵⁸³ Response to the interviews by informants.

⁵⁸⁴ A consensus of opinions from the respondents on the field.

⁵⁸⁵ Bamidele, O., Op. cit. p.25-27.

apostolate, to the needs of the poor, to the needs of the orphans, to the needs of the world”⁵⁸⁶.

5.2.6 Indissolubility

The culture of the Yoruba and Church doctrine are in total agreement on the issue of divorce because marriage once contracted is regarded as binding for ever. The biblical refrain of Matthew’s Gospel 19: 3-8 - “What God has joined together, let no man put asunder”. This is expressed as “*olele to ba wonu eko ko tun jade mo*” - a concept referring to the intractable blend of pap and bean-flour - thus ruling out divorce. The families, apart from the great pains taken to contract the marriage, also fulfil a part of the obligations in ensuring that the union does not fail. For example, as noted, there are modalities for ironing-out differences, counselling and giving moral and financial support to make the marriage succeed, even in the case of the death of one partner as it is still believed that they are in a union joined perpetually by God.

Other measures used to solidify this indissolubility among the Yoruba involves moral sanctions such as:

“Within the society, a woman is never married twice. They may either be inherited as widows or be married as wives outside the family of the late husband, but the marriage ceremony is never gone through again under any circumstances”⁵⁸⁷.

This is very much in line with the Christian dictates of Matthew where Christ says: “and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery”⁵⁸⁸. Once married, no sexual intercourse is allowed between a wife and another man, i.e. no adultery is allowed within the society; apart from her husband, no other adult male can either kiss, embrace, or lie on the same bed with a married woman, no matter how closely related he is to her husband or even herself. These are measures employed by the community to safeguard abuses in marriage and uphold indissolubility of marriage.

⁵⁸⁶ An address to Nigerian families by Pope John Paul II during his visit to Nigeria in February 1982.

⁵⁸⁷ Tape-recorded interview with Chief Babatunde Oyafemi, an informant and historian.

⁵⁸⁸ Matt. 5:17-37.

For the two institutions therefore, marriage remains a permanent institution in its nature although, as pointed out in chapter three, for the Yoruba, it is dissolvable in principle and even in the Church there are certain categories of marriage like a non-sacramental or an unconsummated sacramental marriage which, according to Pius XII⁵⁸⁹, are 'intrinsically dissoluble' and as such could be dissolved either in virtue of the Pauline Privilege or (by virtue) of the Papal Ministerial Power. However in order to achieve this goal (i.e. the permanent nature of marriage), the youths have to be thoroughly prepared for this life-long commitment.

Over 90% of our informants agreed on the issue of indissolubility with just about 5% saying if there are strong reasons the union may be dissolved but certainly on account of childlessness. Johnson lent his voice on this when he says:

"Divorce is very rare, so rare as to be practically considered as non-existing. It is by no means easily obtained especially when there are children of the union"⁵⁹⁰.

In Yoruba traditional society, marriage, as was described at length in chapter three, is not just an affair of one day or a month. In order to meet the demands of married life, a very long time was devoted for the adequate preparation of the intending couples. This went through various stages such as the investigations carried out by the marriage intermediary, the negotiations between families of the intending couple, and the courtship period before the final traditional wedding. Thus James Coriden and his collaborators are right in asserting that in most ancient societies marriage was concluded by means of a process as opposed to a single legally recognized act⁵⁹¹. George Lobo confirms this view which is manifested in the following report:

⁵⁸⁹ Pius XII, 1930, Op. cit.

⁵⁹⁰ Johnson, O.S., The History of the Yorubas, Op. cit. p.113-117.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. Coriden, J. et al., (eds), The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary, New York, Geoffrey Chapman, 1985, p.746.

“During the Synod on the family, one African Episcopal Conference had referenced to the fact that marriage for the Africans is a progressive event involving the parties and their families...”⁵⁹².

Likewise in both the documents of Vatican II and the New Code of Canon Law, on account of the new development in the theology of marriage, great importance is attached to marriage preparation and emphasis is laid on the need for the Christian community to take an active part not only in the preparation of the intending couples for marriage but also to assist the couples in their married lives especially in time of crisis in order to be able to overcome the difficulties of marriage. Inculturating by baptising these values of traditional preparations will help a long way in stabilizing Christian marriage.

The African Synodal document wastes no time in affirming that: “While adopting the positive values of modernity, the African family must preserve its own essential values”⁵⁹³.

The time and effort put into the traditional preparations remain essential and cherished values of the African family to be preserved and even inculturated by the Church.

5.2.7 Care of the Orphans/Widows

The communal life-style adopted in the extended family guaranteed support for each component member at youth, adulthood and old age.

In strict Christian doctrine, these people are to be comforted and supported by the Christian family - that is the Church. In Yoruba culture there is no evidence of orphanages or old-people's homes. Each family unit ensured that the orphans/widows are integrated into another sub-family within the group with the larger family acting as patrons and matrons thus giving them the desired stability.

5.2.8 Respect for Elders, Sacred Things and those in Positions of Authority

One of the ten Commandments talks of respect for parents and elders so that one might live long⁵⁹⁴. As already noted, respect is the guiding principle for behaviour within the family and in the society at large. It requires acknowledgement of and submission to persons in authority.

⁵⁹² Lobo, G., The New Marriage Law, Bombay: St. Paul's Publications, 1984, p.18.

⁵⁹³ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, Op. cit. No.80, p.87.

⁵⁹⁴ The Book of Exodus, Chapters 34 & 35.

The components of kingship noted and discussed extensively in chapter two found common to the Yoruba traditions may be a leap forward towards a definite understanding of *king-Christology* among African traditional religious cultures. Like the evangelists of the synoptic gospels noted, the kingship of Christ is a traditional article of faith⁵⁹⁵. Its complementarity with African kingship cultural thought-forms can be pressed and thereafter harnessed to profit the most audacious of inculturational programmes of the Church in Africa today. When inculturation is understood as the effort by a local Church, what Aylward Shorter calls inculturation from below⁵⁹⁶ to incarnate the Christian message in its cultures; namely to demonstrate how Christian faith must be lived in local situations, then the *nativization* of the gospel to the African kingship ideas in theology, ecclesiology and liturgy shall be seen to belong intrinsically to the process of making the good news of Christ's kingship more meaningful and intelligible to the African peoples. Inculturating Christ's kingship presupposes, of course, that certain unwholesome elements in traditional African kingship systems be judged by the gospel and be rejected, modified or adapted.

The King-Christology will therefore be seen as the disengagement of the supra-cultural aspects of the gospel on the subject of Christ's kingship from its Western cultural trappings in order to profit the African situations. This is perhaps one of the ways its eventual contextualization within the African familiar concepts, thought-forms and expressions can be realised. The envisaged change must be allowed to permeate Africa's social institutions in order to achieve the transformations of some of the traditional religious practices still associated with the installations of kings and chiefs being currently revived in contemporary Africa. This is important in so far as the manner or forms in which man, especially the African personality, responds to God is closely tied to his culture and thus relative.

Acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as African King implies making him at home in Africa's rich spiritual universe as one who fulfils Africans' spiritual hopes and aspirations. A king-Christology which springs from the African context and from the African joy and experience of the Christian faith cannot be in anyway inferior as against any other form of conceiving who Jesus is to Africans and their descendants everywhere. What matters is how well such a Christological perception faithfully reflects biblical witness and traditional

⁵⁹⁵ Cf. Manus, U.C., Christ, The African King, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993, pp.214-238.

⁵⁹⁶ Shorter, A., Evangelization and Culture, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, pp.139-160, esp. p.139.

Christian faith. In the light of this conception, the mandate of Pope Pius XII will be put into context:

“The herald of the gospel and messenger of Christ is an apostle. His office does not demand that he transplant European civilization and culture, and no other, to foreign soil, there to take root and propagate itself. His task in dealing with these peoples, who sometimes boast a very old and highly developed culture of their own, is to teach and form them so that they are ready to accept willingly and in a practical manner, the principles of Christian life and morality; principles, I might add, that fit into any culture, provided it be good and sound, and which give that culture greater force in safeguarding human dignity and in gaining human happiness. Catholic inhabitants of missionary countries, although they are first of all citizens of the kingdom of God and members of his great family, do not for all that cease to be citizens of their earthly fatherland”⁵⁹⁷.

In like manner, Christians are called to pay the “Emperor what belongs to the Emperor and pay God what belongs to God”⁵⁹⁸.

5.2.9 Efficacy of Prayers

Prayers offered by the group especially elders are believed to be efficacious. References to biblical instances of the blessing of Isaac and Jacob, and the prayers offered by the Patriarchs constitute part of the recitals in the Church today especially the *Nunc Dimitis* by Simon at the presentation and the naming of the baby Jesus. References also are made of James 5:14-17 - the power of prayers to heal. Similarly the Yorubas believe as noted that “*Enu agba lase wa, Enu agba lobi ti igbo*” - ‘Prayers offered by elders are always efficacious’. A number of respondents are of the view that God gave special “power” (privilege) to elders and parents to pray and that such prayers are readily answered. Thus most rites of naming, marriage and other celebrations have exclusive segments reserved when parents and oldest members pray or those in religious authority give their blessings.

⁵⁹⁷ Hickey, R., Modern Missionary Documents and Africa, Dublin, 1982, p.99.

⁵⁹⁸ Luke: 20: 25. Good News Bible, Catholic Edition.

5.2.10 Role of Women

Women certainly in most cultures are relegated to the background and regarded as unequal partners. In marriage and family life it is the woman that must change abode, and live permanently in accordance with the norms of the husband's race and family.

The roles of women as outlined in Proverbs Chapter 30:10-31, is strikingly similar to that expected of her in Yoruba culture.

Religiously, women are relegated to the background in view of their child-rearing experience and the fact that there are certain periods when they are highly incapable of particular religious obligations.

In Oro hierarchy, we have the *Iya agan* - (Agan's mother) a status role for the women past child-rearing age, a point at which women are regarded as mature⁵⁹⁹. In Gelede they participate fully in the organisation of the shows and in dancing and music but must not wear a mask. Sudarkasa in her research findings contests strongly that in pre-colonial and pre-industrial Africa, there was no separation between women's domestic and public spheres. According to her:

"In more traditional West-Africa, domestic groups were (and are) extended families built around segments of matri- or patri-lineages. The predominant type of domestic grouping consisted of an extended family comprising male members of a lineage, their wives, and children"⁶⁰⁰.

These groups as noted earlier resided in dwellings normally referred to as compounds. Within compounds, which range in size from about twenty or thirty persons, both males and females have roles of authority. Members of the compound are usually ranked according to seniority, with order of birth being the determinant of seniority within the lineage core of the compound, and order of marriage into the compound being the determinant of seniority among the wives of the male members of the lineage. Within the polygamous subdivision of the extended family, wives are also ranked according to the same principle of seniority. There is normally an official male head of the compound and a female counterpart whose primary responsibility is the safeguarding of the welfare of the women of the house. Sudarkasa's thesis is backed up by John Njoku's analysis of the suppression of women's power with the arrival of

⁵⁹⁹ Interview with Chief Babatunde Oyafemi, Op. cit.

⁶⁰⁰ Sudarkasa, N., Where Women Work, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1973, pp.97-116.

colonial government⁶⁰¹. Women's role could find a place in Christian marriage as the Church calls for equality of sex in marriage.

5.2.11 Life after Death

In Yoruba thought, a human being is more than just a body. He has, as already noted, a spiritual element which is the breath of God. Sometime, this is even referred to as God-in-man⁶⁰². Without any Christian theological influence on the Yoruba thought, the Yoruba see body and soul as closely interwoven and often speaks of them as if they were one. Yet it is known that at death the spirit leaves the body. For them the spirit which leaves the body at death is not merely the breath, for the Yorubas distinguish breath, shadow and influence, from a man's own personality. While the Yoruba had their medicine given to heal the sick yet they acknowledge the need for a spiritual remedy.

For the African and especially Yoruba, there is life after death. Death is not the end of a human being. After death, his body decays, the soul goes to the beyond - not to Sheol or Hades in the fashion of the Hebrew or Greek thoughts - but to the Heavenly realm where he joins his ancestors. And that is if he led a good life. Those who did not live good lives cannot reach this heavenly realm. They are supposed to be roaming around the ethereal sphere⁶⁰³. There are so many ideals of such spirits or souls depending on the locality. Some believe that if appropriate sacrifices are made on behalf of the deceased soul, it may still attain the heavenly sphere. Others believe that such spirits roam around to do harm. Others still believe that such spirits are responsible for reincarnation⁶⁰⁴.

⁶⁰¹ Cf. Njoku, J.E.E., The Igbos of Nigeria, United Kingdom: Edwin Melle Press, 1990, p.82.

⁶⁰² Tape-recorded interview with Bishop Fagun. Op. cit.

⁶⁰³ Fagun, M.O., "African Inculturation of the Gospel" in Shalom, Vol.III No.3, 1985, pp.119-123.

⁶⁰⁴ There was a consensus of opinion among our informants on the question of reincarnation judging from the names giving to children born immediately after the death of a notable person in the family: e.g. any of the parents or grandparents. If the child happens to be male and born after the death of a male, elderly person in the family, he is giving the name "Babatunde" - 'The father has returned' or if female, she is given the name "Yetunde".

The noted samples of African theology based on mythology show that the Yoruba and Africans as a whole have a stepping stone on which Christian theology can be grasped and re-expressed in familiar cultural terms⁶⁰⁵.

5.2.12 Yoruba Moral Theology

Matters relating to morality and divine sanction, abound in Yoruba culture as mentioned in chapters two and three to a considerable extent when compared with revealed moral law and its Christian moral ramifications. Though African moral code is limited to behaviour in society, helping or hurting one's neighbour and offending or pleasing the deity, it concedes that it is sinful to take one's life. However the sin of thought was not given much consideration in African moral code as to merit divine sanction. Yet the Yoruba place much premium on *Oninu rere* (one with pure thoughts, with good intentions, well-wisher) and *Oninu buburu* (the contrary of the above)⁶⁰⁶.

It is in the moral sphere that inculturation of the gospel has little or nothing to bother about, since there is a naturally coming together of both the new and the old. They are coterminous, yet it is an area so much flaunted today due to modern materialism that is often referred to as 'Western civilization'.

But the greatest bone of contention is the Western legislation about marriage now regarded as Christian which should not be forced on the African because it has no cultural value whatsoever with the African. The Code of Canon Law codification about legitimacy and validity of marriage cannot hold water in Africa⁶⁰⁷. Here inculturation of the gospel is highly required. It is gratifying that the new code of Canon Law has left this area of inculturation to the National Episcopal Conferences for implementation - (Canon 1120).

5.3 Areas of Conflict

There are similarities as much as there are dissimilarities. These call for patient understanding in view of the fact that Christianity, having transversed many cultures, has added traits of these cultures, many covertly, others overtly. Thus in the manner in which they are presented here, the differences are mainly conceptual.

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. Chapter 2, sub-section 2.2.2.

⁶⁰⁶ Fagun, M.O., Bishop, interview. Op. cit.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

i) **Monogamy:** In the encounter between Christianity and the African culture, perhaps the most vexing issues have been generated by the African traditional form of marriage, which includes the practice of polygyny, the conduct of marriage in stages, and an aversion to celibacy. Simultaneous Polygamy, the practice of one man having many wives legally married to him at the same time, is not only tolerated, but is often the desirable form of marriage under a number of circumstances in many parts of Africa and especially among the Yoruba. Whereas for the Western mind of the 20th century, the practice of polygyny is not only synonymous with adultery and prostitution, but represents perhaps the worst expression of sexual promiscuity, male-lust and female subjugation,⁶⁰⁸ in the mind of the traditional Africans, it represents a commitment to life and to propagation of the race⁶⁰⁹. Christian marriage is viewed from the perspective of monogamy. Strictly a union of man and a woman, a contract between two people. This contradicts the Yoruba concept. Polygamy is taken for granted but to marry another wife, the man needs the consent of his first wife, though generally she is not supposed to raise any objection. One reason for marrying another wife may be lack of children from the first wife⁶¹⁰. In the past, marrying many wives was a sign of wealth and high social standing⁶¹¹.

Polygamy to the Yoruba was certainly not merely a means of satisfying male-lust. It had social and economic functions and advantages and was often a remedy for divorce⁶¹². In addition, marriage implies the union of the families not just the parties. Consent is given at the family's permission.

Circumstances where a monogamous marriage becomes polygamous may be (i) succession, in case of a king, (ii) inheriting a deceased brother's wife, and (iii) an arranged wedding where the union is solemnized to solidify bonds between families, friends or ruling houses. With regard to this practice, owing to the widespread influence of Western education

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. John Aniagwu, "An African Christianity: Toward a Rational Indigenization", in The Nigerian Journal of Theology, Vol.1. No.4, 1988, p.112.

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. Ehusani, G.O., An Afro-Christian Vision, America: University Press, 1991, p.205.

⁶¹⁰ This is a view expressed by many of our informants.

⁶¹¹ Cf. Abe, G.O., Op. cit. p.7.

⁶¹² Ibid.

and highly-changed social and economic conditions, polygamy is no longer fashionable. The problem of children in marriage can be counter-acted through proper education about the adoption of children.

From the cultural point of view, while it is necessary to revive some aspects of our culture like the sense of solidarity and communal concern for the preparation of the youths for marriage, yet according to Onimhawo's remarks: "any aspect of the culture which does not help to build up the higher values should not be given a chance to exist"⁶¹³.

In this context, it is obvious that polygamy is an aspect of this culture which instead of helping to build up higher values, lowers the dignity of women and as such should never be given a chance to exist⁶¹⁴. In other words, this is one of the areas to which the Church has to direct or focus its attention when discharging her liberating function in Yoruba society.

Another aspect of Yoruba culture which is in need of liberation is in the double-standard morality in which intact virginity was required of a girl whilst that of a man was ignored. Since in the light of the Gospel there is no distinction between Jews and Greeks, male and female for all are children of the same heavenly Father⁶¹⁵, this double-standard with regard to marriage should be abolished. The same measure is expected of the male counterpart. In other words, the same yardstick of morality (virginal purity) should be used to measure or rather be required of both male and female when preparing youths for marriage.

ii) **Inheritance:** This is based on a number of factors most of which are extraneous to the bible. In Yoruba cultures, the lineage is preserved as fathers are inherited by their children.

Wives and estates are shared within family members with the extended family serving as trustees. Today, there are wills, except for those who died intestate. Consequently female and male children are inheritors, this has its own implications. A system where only the offspring of the deceased and his wife inherit was preached by the missionaries and supported by their colonial government allies as already noted. Hence Dayton Roberts notes: "The traditional system had served to hold together many extended families, but it has been opposed by missionaries and in government ownership..."⁶¹⁶.

⁶¹³ Op. cit.

⁶¹⁴ Cf. Onimhawo, J., Op. cit. p.17.

⁶¹⁵ Cf. Gal. 3:28.

⁶¹⁶ Roberts, W.D., (ed), Africa: A Season for Hope, California: Regal Books, 1985, p.36.

iii) **Widowhood:** A widow is not left as a widow. On the transition of the husband as earlier noted, she is inherited by the deceased brother or his next of kin. However, if she is very old, she becomes the responsibility of the entire family and her children. These include biological children and those raised under her roof. The main thrust of charity in Christianity is the labelling of the women as widows, deserving the attention of all. Saint Paul went further to advice that if young, she should re-marry. The missionaries, and only a few faithful have shown genuine care and concern for these people and as time progressed, old people's homes open in a number of cities to accommodate the aged, women and men who have no close relatives to cater for them. One such centre is in the parish the researcher stayed in⁶¹⁷.

With urbanisation, women find it more convenient today as widows, inspite of the traditional norms, to remain on their own without attachment to any relative of the husband. They rely on the popular Yoruba saying that: "*Jesu ni oko opo*" (Jesus is the husband of the widow), to show that Jesus cares. Widowhood is then symbolised by wearing of black apparels, - non-routing and non-participation in social activities for a given period of time in mourning. The Christian doctrine especially in the light of the gospel does not share this idea. This is divergent to cherished mores of the people.

iv) **Place of Children:** Children are rated as assets and are regarded as necessities. A number of monogamous marriages have become polygamous in the search for children. With the traditional setting, childlessness is regarded as evil, a calamity as the Yoruba put this in context:

*"Omo olomo soro pe ranse,
Edumare fun mi ni temi."*

*"It is not easy to engage someone else's
ward on errand, Almighty God give me mine".*

⁶¹⁷ From my interview with the management of Regina Mundi old-people's home, all the inmates have no direct people to look after them. Most of them have no serious attachment with their extended family. They were more or less picked up from dungeons and brought to the old-people's home.

Many respondents believe that, children are a sign of blessing of a marriage. Lack of children is a problem that brings pressure on the couple by family members from both sides. They are often encouraged to consult *Aladura* prophets, to try native doctors and of late, they are encouraged to visit a gynaecologist.

The central teaching of the Church in this regard is love between persons, the spouses, and possibly (where there are children involved) spouses' children. Vatican II conceives marriage and family as a community of love. So the dignity of marriage and the family remains the central task of the Church's doctrine. The Church with the New Code of Canon Law has dropped procreation as the main end of marriage. She now focuses mainly on the conjugal aspect of the couples. Love between spouses is giving and enriching the life of each other, preparing the spouses for the moment when their mutuality can give rise to new life⁶¹⁸.

The Church equally teaches patience, and bearing the situation as a cross. While about 60% of respondents accepted that this is one of the likely difficulties that may be encountered in a marriage, not more than 10% are willing to accept it as an ordained situation and as an act of God. Up to 40% still opined that the issue could be by witchcraft or due to medical reasons in which case pre-marital pregnancy is suggested. 5% clearly indicate that without any evidence of pregnancy they will not allow the Church wedding to take place.

After all is said and done, the Church's position is that childlessness should be seen as a vocation for service on the part of the couples. The encyclical, *Familiaris Consortio* states: "it must not be forgotten however, that, even when procreation is not possible, conjugal life does not for this reason lose its value"⁶¹⁹.

And to Nigerians, while in Lagos the Pope said:

"...your love for each other is complete and fruitful when it is open to others, to the needs of the apostolate, to the needs of the poor, to the needs of the orphans, to the needs of the world"⁶²⁰.

⁶¹⁸ Jack Dominian in a contribution to an address given by Karol Wojtyla, then Cardinal Archbishop of Cracow, at the International Congress on family problems held at Milan in June 1978 to mark the tenth anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* in Fruitful and Responsible Love, Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1978, pp.43-50.

⁶¹⁹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, AAS 73 (1981), No.14, pp.81-191.

⁶²⁰ Op. cit. p.381.

This is contrary to the views of the people as expressed thus:

“There is nothing to compare with the passion and desire and craving of an *Ibo* for children and the love and attachment that exists between parents and their children”⁶²¹.

This assertion is equally true of the Yoruba and the feeling that childlessness is a tragedy, a calamity befalling the whole family. The other fourteen informants confirmed that “the desire is borne out of who will sustain their *Origun* (Corner or abode) when they depart if there is no male child. No matter how affectionate the woman is she must be at her own home. The male is much expected to cater for the aged parents and give them befitting burial”⁶²².

Has this position been affected by Christian values and teachings coupled with Westernization? In a way, yes, as female children perform dust-to-dust rites today, pay for expensive caskets and the cost of digging the grave. One lady informant who is the only child said:

“I did everything to the admiration of the extended family members. It cost me much money”⁶²³.

These areas of discord between the Church and tradition need to be examined closely in view of the fact that there are striking similarities in the view of both on children; their welfare and their duty, as stated in Psalm 127:4-7 and the joy in having them surrounds a dutiful wife and table as in Psalm 128. The family is thus perpetually miserable and efforts are made to pay and get the situation rectified. Pressures are also brought to bear on the husband to take a second wife, thus monogamy could become polygamy. Many women also believe in

⁶²¹ Ugboko, P.G., "The Betrothal Consent among the Ibos of Nigeria with reference to Canon 1017, Pontifical University, Rome, (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis) 1958, p.147.

⁶²² Recorded interviews on the field.

⁶²³ Teniola, 36, was the only issue of the parents. An Accountant, she is married and resident in Lagos. She is the only inheritor of the 'Dad' who left her with half of his possession and the other half for the family. Lagos, 17th Aug., 1995.

Yorubaland that “*Ori omo lo n pe omo wa ye*” i.e. the luck of the second wife in bearing children could ‘unlock’ the riddle and the first wife too will be a mother.

A number of women who were interviewed also desired male children. Ten claimed that their husbands went into polygamy exclusively because they were having girls, though some later had boys.

vi) **The Role of Women in Ceremonies:** During important celebrations in family life, women have specific roles as described by Surdakasa:

“on many occasions, including naming ceremonies for newborn babies, weddings and funerals, the wives of the compound collectively carried out specific roles that were traditionally assigned to them”⁶²⁴.

Women are kept in the background and assigned specific functions, proposing and responding to the toast of an engagement while the formal request and answer will be given by the fathers. During the naming ceremonies, their role is also limited as the child is entitled to names following after stereotyped patterns as earlier noted. In all these, the women tell the manner of birth and the men will proudly announce the names of the baby. The woman is expected to observe some family taboos for some reasonable period of time after birth until the naming day. Women are given the opportunity to stand side by side with men in marriage, baptism and can often sponsor a child at baptism.

During burial rites, women are excluded from some key aspects involved like bathing the corpse, dressing for it, and the rituals of transition. They are only called in during the lying in state. At this time they can send messages, bring forth cloth and weep openly. They are expected to send messages through the deceased to other ancestors already on the other side of the great divide. The carrying of the coffin and lowering of it are male preserves. The ‘dust-to-dust’ ceremony will be done by the female after the male. Christianity and Western education has changed quite a few of these. Some of those interviewed actually arranged for the dress the father/mother will wear and witnessed the dressing at the mortuary. Another set arranged for undertakers, the lying in state and bought the casket. Lola Eromosele, a female informant, responded:

“I handled all the burial arrangements being the eldest child available. Supportive services were given by work-mates and Church members”⁶²⁵.

⁶²⁴ Op. cit. p.45.

The status of women traditionally seems to be minor from birth to about the age of menopause when she is credited with some degree of maturity. Western value and Christian teachings teach something quite different. As from the age of 18 years, a girl can vote, can marry, she can also inherit. The Church, except in the issue of granting Holy Orders to women (which remains a heated issue today in the Western societies, including the mainstream Churches) believes in the equality of both sexes before God at least by way of saying. For example, in some of our main Churches today, there are adaptations of the traditional social titles brought to the Churches. For example, we have *Iya Ijo* (Mother of the Church) as you have *Baba Ijo* (Father of the Christian community). There are Church societies exclusively for women, lady chairman or chairperson during important Church occasions. Among the Protestant Churches, there are *Egbe aya Bishop*, this society arose as a result of the Protestant's bishop being allowed to marry and that the wife is supposed to have a society or group she belongs to in the Christian community. They equally have others like Esthers' Society and the Good-Women Association. All these are Christian adaptations of the basic unit that wives constitute in the extended family.

The interviews conducted revealed that most women acquiesce with the situation even in the light of roles played by historical and biblical figures such as the folk song below collected at Ilorin:

*"Awa obinrin lo bi
Jesu Olugbala
tawon okunrin kan mogi
obinrin lobi."*

"Women gave birth to Jesus
Jesus the saviour
Nailed to the cross by men
Women gave birth to Him"⁶²⁶.

⁶²⁵ Lola Eromosele, 36, a civil servant, she is married and resident in Lagos. Interviewed in Lagos, 14th April 1995.

⁶²⁶ Collected from interviews at Ilorin, Kwara State.

The women continue to feel that even God had a preference for men. The issue of gender is also very important in civil and religious life. Even in a matrilineal society where women marry wives, such wives are meant for the husbands.

Of the thirty people interviewed, two actually married wives for their husbands, to relieve themselves of burden, five prevailed on their husbands to take a second wife to have more children as many children are a blessing to the family. Three said as the only son they are always lonely when wives are called and they have to be few for such homesteads⁶²⁷.

On the roles ascribed to them, since this is from ancient times, they are contented with the slight change that has come their way. "*Iya-Bode* and a few others said they have had no knowledge of the names of their children until it was publicly announced"⁶²⁸.

"Mr. & Mrs. Ojo on the other hand, knew only when the baptismal form was filled. They were actually waiting on *grandpa* who asked his elder brother to do it as the proper father of the baby being the oldest man of the Ojo family in Lagos and at home in Share in Irepodun local Government area of Kwara State"⁶²⁹.

The status of women seems to be divided into three broad categories: childhood, wife and mother whereas men have opportunities of being involved in a lot of matters as they move through their phases. Women are regarded as having seven rib-bones whilst men have nine! - a transliteration with reference to the myth of creation. They further add that women have no Adam's apple and can therefore not store secrets: i.e.- "*obinrin oni gogongo*".

In spite of science and religion, the bias generated by these myths still holds sway on the outlook of the people. Though Christianity itself preached equality, the narration of the creation of Eve from Adam's ribs is still against their cause.

vii) **Factors of Stability:** The family has been a factor of stability to each component unit, the old family set up has religion, political and economic responsibilities towards each member. Each family unit is a macro-society fully integrated and yet independent; fully mobile and connected by marriage to a number of other families. New families, as exposed

⁶²⁷ Tape-recorded interviews.

⁶²⁸ Interview with some informants on the roles ascribed to them by Yoruba society.

⁶²⁹ Tape-recorded interview with Mr. and Mrs. Ojo in Lagos on the impact the extended family has on them.

through Church teachings and Western influence, are in contrast to the old. They are often products of inter-ethnic marriages such as in Japan as noted by Kalman:

“Urban migration and greater geographical and social mobility in the society as a whole, particularly for recent college graduates, give rise to an assemblage of people with diverse back grounds....”⁶³⁰.

The situation above corresponds with the situation at the other side of the Niger river where Bishop Crowther was accused of allowing immigrants to marry the local people just because the two parties were Christians; also, some Christian converts were known for breaking traditional rules because they regarded some traditional practices as fetish, barbaric and uncivilized⁶³¹. Thus, by the turn of the century, most Christian couples contented themselves with living with boys deposited with them as teachers, apprentices and one or two cousins very close to the family. The idea of the nuclear family had been propagated.

The traditional focus of education attached to the family, mostly informal but professionally-based, was losing out to formal education handled by the Church. This was also effectively used as means of evangelization. Teaching became a glorified profession. Mrs Kufo, one of our informants said: “My father was a teacher, he encouraged me to be a teacher too”⁶³².

A large percentage of respondents said that missionary activities and pronouncements weakened the extended family:

“It is true they preached unity and love, and that Christians belong to one family, but they were not tolerant towards other denominations and even less so towards native religion”⁶³³.

According to Prince:

⁶³⁰ Applbaum, K.D., Op. cit. p.38.

⁶³¹ Uzukwu, E.E., Op. cit. p.164.

⁶³² Mrs. V.O. Kufo, (aged 56yrs), Retired Educationalist, Lagos, April 1995.

⁶³³ Prince Adeola Oye, (aged 52yrs), Baptist, Management Practitioner, Lagos, May 1995.

“My father was an *Elegungun* (a masquerade believer), he died practising his faith and allowed my mother, a convert, to go to the Church with us children. His elder brother, who became a Roman Catholic member, was usually criticized for going to a Church that uses images by his Baptist siblings”⁶³⁴.

What the traditional society witnessed was a rivalry between Christian denominations as they tried to outsmart each other, especially over the level of education provided.

(viii) **Mixed Marriages: A Dilemma to the Africans.** In the area of inter-church marriages: coined ‘mixed marriages’, the Roman Catholic Church officially discouraged such unions inspite of the fact that the Church believed in ecumenism.

In a broader outlook, the working paper on the African Synod outlines the aims and objectives of ecumenical movements in the modern times:

“It aims at overcoming obstacles to unity posed by differing doctrines, disciplines and structures so that all Christians may give common expression to their faith in Jesus Christ and undertake in common the evangelization of human society”⁶³⁵.

The fruits of this debate or dialogue after the synod has not yet materialized as far as the Nigerian Church is concerned in the area of ‘mixed marriage’. This assertion is borne by the interview we made on the field with one of the participants. He described mixed marriage as:

“A necessary evil which requires dispensation and basically, the Church does not encourage it”⁶³⁶.

Thus, in order to build an authentic and gift-shared type of solidarity and virile ecumenism in the universal Church, then the local Church in Nigeria and especially in Yorubaland, with its cultural heritage, must be taken into account. Speaking of the correct attitude in the context of ecumenism or solidarity among Churches, Karol Wojtyla (now Pope John Paul II) opined:

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ *Instrumentum Laboris*, p.62.

⁶³⁶ Interview with Arch-Bishop John Onayekan, Abuja Archdiocese, Nigeria, 1995, vice-president of the African Synod of Bishops.

“The attitude of solidarity means respect for all parts that are the share of every member of the community”⁶³⁷.

So, if the Church is a union or communion of all the various local Churches, which are bound together by the Holy Spirit, each part that makes up the whole must be respected.

The immediate reaction of some parents, sisters and brothers, grandparents, godparents, and the wider family of aunts, uncles, and cousins matters immensely to an engaged couple who announce their marriage. The ideal response is a complete, unconditional love for the couple. But even when this happens, after-thoughts can temper the initial joy of a son or daughter's announcement if the ecumenical conversion has not yet touched a person. In some instances, an immediate negative response can dishearten the couple. Nothing can so discourage the engaged inter-church couple as the hesitation or disappointment voiced or detected during the initial days of their decision to marry. Mrs. Felicia Adeeko, an informant who married traditionally but has not rectified her marriage in the Church gave stiff opposition from her family as a reason for their not marrying initially in the Church.

“My parents are very prominent Catholic members who would not succumb to their daughter marrying a non-Catholic person because of the presumed scandal it would cause, most especially with their parish priest and other members of the Church against inter-church marriage of their daughter. So in that circumstance, they just allowed a quiet low-keyed traditional engagement and did not proceed to the Church marriage”⁶³⁸.

Situations like that of Mrs. Adeeko are very common among the Yoruba Christians. During the field work also, the Catholic Women's Organization in the parish organized a one day seminar on the role of Catholic mothers in the family. A topical issue at the seminar was the way Catholic girls inter-marry non-Catholic Christians. A lot of the parents are worried because the “Church” is already pointing an accusing finger to them because of their permissiveness in allowing their daughters to have their way. But one of the participants came openly saying:

⁶³⁷ Wojtyla, K., "The Acting Person", in Fruitful and Responsible Love, Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1978, p.285.

⁶³⁸ Interview with Mrs. Felicia Adeeko, an informant who is not happy with the injustice of inter-church marriage on the couples involved.

“But the Catholic Church believes and preaches ecumenism; that all Christians share the same Christ so why then should I force my daughter against her choice?”⁶³⁹.

This double-standard on the part of the Catholic Church is frowned on by some Christians who see no impediments in inter-church marriages, at least between Christian Churches. If the Catholic Church’s teachings accuse African families of having a stake in the selection of who the daughter or son should marry, why does the Catholic Church impress it on Catholic parents to encourage their wards to marry from the same Church? Some of the blame can be laid at the foot of Western civilization for this because of the introduction of education and mobility which has broken the barriers to inter-ethnic or inter-cultural marriages in Africa and especially in Nigeria. Some of the young couples interviewed claimed that they met their partners while they were in school together and in most cases during their tertiary education, and from there, their friendship developed which eventually resulted in marriage without pre-condition in the spheres of faith or ethnicity but based on genuine and mutual love for one another.

Evangelization of human society today in the pluralistic world of humanity has a more open task and is more sophisticated in its approach. It cannot be limited to the simple message of salvaging the soul from eternal damnation. It embraces the totality of the human person and society here and now. To a large extent, such an assignment can bear fruit if it is undertaken by all and in common. A greater maturity and sense of mission should be exercised today in Africa in the search for harmony and co-existence between inter-faith brothers and nations:

“It would mean an exploration into the memory of our various traditions, not only to secure our identity but also to take up to the inter-dependence of the various Church communities. It would mean a rejection of exclusive or controversial theology which sees the other Churches as adversaries; a theology interested in asserting the difference between one community and the other. Our ecumenism must distance itself from the linear tendencies of

⁶³⁹ Mrs. Labiran, C.O., one of the participants at the seminar. The researcher applied the observation method in the recording of the statements through the use of a tape recorder in March 1995.

the Western thought-patterns and pay close attention to the African traditional, cultural perception of the universe”⁶⁴⁰.

The reaction of the traditional religionists and neo-cultural revivalists points unmistakably to the dilemma of the so-called imported religion. Obierika in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was referring to this very dilemma when he lamented, questioning the purpose of the whole venture:

“How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together as we have fallen apart”⁶⁴¹.

Once the Roman Catholic Church had recognized the gathered assemblies of other baptized Christians as “Churches and ecclesial communities”, part of the one Church of Christ, the ancient question of how distinct Churches would relate to one another uncoiled. As so often in the past, ecumenists turned to a biblical concept from the New Testament, the Greek word *Koinonia*, to capture the genius of unity in diversity⁶⁴².

Our progress toward *Koinonia*, or full communion, as an institutional agreement is not the final goal. Much as that unity lived in a eucharistic communion (which inter-church families and ecumenists long to enjoy) summons us as an object of concern, it is only a step in the ever-longer pilgrimage. Ultimately, the eucharistic communion of Anglicans and Roman Catholics, or any future configuration of formal intercommunion among Churches, will take us beyond self-consciousness that we might serve others. In the words of Kilcourse, *Koinonia* is for the purpose of service, the *diakonia* which the New Testament and apostolic tradition identifies as the essence of Christian life⁶⁴³. It is this same understanding of the eucharist which the ‘Faith and Order Commission’ of the World Council of Churches proposed in its

⁶⁴⁰ Uzukwu, E.E., "Ecumenism in Africa: Challenges and Prospects", in Evangelization in Africa in the Third Millennium, Port-Harcourt: CIWA Press, 1992, p.168.

⁶⁴¹ Achebe, C., Op. cit. p.124.

⁶⁴² Cf. Kilcourse, G., Op. cit. p.133.

⁶⁴³ Kilcourse, G., Op. cit. p.140.

remarkable consensus statement of 1982, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. It is the insight which ARCIC's *Koinonia* interpretation of eucharist has made manifest: *becoming* the body of Christ for the transformation of the world:

"The eucharist embraces all aspects of life. It is a representative act of thanksgiving and offering on behalf of the whole world. The eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life...All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ. Through the eucharist, the all-renewing grace of God penetrates and restores human personality and dignity. The eucharist involves the believer in the central event of the world's history. As participants in the eucharist, therefore, we prove inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this ongoing restoration of the world's situation and the human condition"⁶⁴⁴.

If ecumenism in Africa is seen in this new limelight, the tendency to exaggerate problems and areas of difference among the various Churches and institutions will be minimized. With time, dialogue will centre on common areas of interest than on doctrines, on the recognition of the values found in each religious group rather than on the emphasis of the superiority of one group over the other. At least in Africa we are sure it is a new type of relationship among Christian Churches that can pave the way for any meaningful dialogue and ecumenism. Pope John Paul II spelt this out in his address to leaders of non-Catholic Christian Churches in Kenya titled: "Division of Christians: A Scandal for the World":

"Wherever possible, then, let us find ways of engaging in acts of common witness, be it in joint bible work, in promoting human rights and meeting human needs (like marriage and family life), in theological dialogue, in praying together when opportunity allow - as it does so beautifully today - or in speaking to others about Jesus Christ and his salvation. As we do these things we must continue to ask the Holy Spirit for light and strength to conform perfectly to God's holy will for his Church"⁶⁴⁵.

⁶⁴⁴ "Eucharist", *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982, No.20.

⁶⁴⁵ Pope John Paul II address to leaders of non-Catholic Christian Churches during his pastoral visit to Kenya on May 7th, 1980.

The 'African solution' to the problem of ecumenism may still be found in the principle of 'live and let live'. It is still possible to achieve some type of 'unity-in-diversity' which does not contradict or ignore the motive of the prayer of the Lord, "that they may be one"⁶⁴⁶.

5.4 Conclusion

God is Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient, in addition He created heaven and earth. These themes criss-cross the philosophy, religion and socio-economic activities of the people and are reflective of the Christian doctrine. These are the physical and spiritual entities which the Bible referred to as dominions and principalities. Yoruba as well as Africans are deeply religious and consecrated people. Thanksgiving is very important. Hence the Yoruba says: "*Eni ti a ba se loore, ti ko dupe bi olosa ko ni leru lo ni*" - 'an ingrate is like a thief'⁶⁴⁷.

Words and attitudes reflecting respect are freely given and show respectively to reflect the deep appreciation to God for providence, of a wife, home, children and health.

Charity and hospitality are encouraged in both Yoruba and Christian cultures to the stranger and the less-privileged. It is on account of these that being our brother's keeper could be fully expressed. A passer-by to a farm or plantation can take, for example, a ration for consumption only. This is regarded as an offering, the reward which is to be earned at "*Isanlu-Orun (Orun Are mabo)*" - 'heaven: the point of no return'. For it is said that no one has been to the great beyond and returned to tell the tales.

Making the Gospel more meaningful is the task of inculturation. With the above listed areas of similarity between Yoruba customs and traditions and Christian doctrine, it is evident that Christ and his message of love, hope and unity can successfully incarnate in Yoruba culture without any let or hindrance to the Universality of the mission.

The centrality of the cross must be preserved by the tacit understanding of concepts and themes of inculturation. Christ will certainly not refuse a symbolism that carries his message effectively, rather he will refuse the bearer of the message who called his brother 'a fool' as this is contrary to his admonition in the synoptic gospels⁶⁴⁸.

⁶⁴⁶ John's Gospel Chapter 17.

⁶⁴⁷ One of the Yoruba wise sayings.

⁶⁴⁸ Matt. 5:22.

The path to inculturation is straight with bias carried over from clear prejudice, developed versus underdeveloped economies, political and economic exploitation, cultural and superiority complexes. There is an urgent need to change; for genuine and balanced inculturation as put by the Synod Fathers:

“A serious concern for a true and balanced inculturation is necessary in order to avoid cultural confusion and alienation in our fast evolving society”⁶⁴⁹.

The challenge by the Pope is also to be fully taken up:

“Today, I urge you to look inside yourselves. Look to the riches of your own traditions, to the faith which we are celebrating in this assembly”⁶⁵⁰.

However, one thing is to talk beautifully about inculturation in Africa, another thing is to see if the rigidity imposed by the almighty power of the Vatican on Churches in Africa is relaxed. Philip Tovey showed the tip of the ice-berg when he cited the case of Bishop Dupont of the diocese of Pala, Chad Republic, who, between 1973-1975, celebrated the eucharist using millet-bread and millet-beer due to difficulties in importing wine, and was subsequently relieved of office because the higher authorities in Roman Catholic Church do not sanction that⁶⁵¹. On the same note, the Zairean liturgy has been appraised as depicting an authentic African Christianity from various quarters with all its dynamism but the Pope in his visit to Zaire refused to celebrate this liturgy. He commented to the Zairean bishops on their visit to Rome that:

“A liturgy corresponding to the soul of African culture cannot be realised except as the result of a progressive maturation of the faith”⁶⁵².

⁶⁴⁹ Op. cit. p.49.

⁶⁵⁰ Papal Homily at the conclusion of the sixth Pastoral Visit in Africa, Lilongwe, 6, May 1989.

⁶⁵¹ Tovey, P., Inculturation: The Eucharist in Africa, Nottingham: Grove Books Ltd., 1988, p.12.

⁶⁵² Cf. Kane, M., "African Liturgy and Papal Visit to Zaire" in AFER, 26(1984), p.246.

Chapter Five

The caution of the authorities that this symbolizes is frustrating as it came out clearly in Kane's comment:

"Does it really need 400 or 500 years, as the Pope seems to suggest, in order to find authentic expression?"⁶⁵³

An ecclesiology which is really to speak to the people of Africa must be grounded in the concept of life. The flood-gate has been opened. The issues of marriage and family life provide the essential fabrics of authentic 'riches' of our own traditions - a proper place for genuine inculturation - the family as the mini-Church. Because of its place and importance Ludwig Schick comments:

"For the growth of God's kingdom, Christ ordained marriage (natural order), through the sacrament of marriage, for a special task in the Church. Marriage should reflect and mediate God's love to humanity and Christ's love for the Church. Thus it has an unconditional and absolutely necessary task in God's kingdom"⁶⁵⁴.

The most urgent need now is to develop in the African Church a 'theology of the future' which will have an accommodation for all on actual condition of modern living. The next chapter is therefore situated in this context and intends to examine now how inculturation is a determining factor in the process of the Church in Africa travelling into the future. The starting-point towards this has been analysed in the preceding chapters through a comprehensive knowledge of the Yoruba culture as an indicator to other African cultures, the system of symbols and meanings through systematic, scientific and sustained effort at research into the elements of African culture.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., p.247.

⁶⁵⁴ Schick, L., "Marriage and Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom of Heaven" in Theology Digest, Vol.36, No.2, Summer 1989, p.138.

6. CHAPTER SIX: THE INCULTURATION OF THE CHURCH ON MARRIAGE

6.1 Preamble

The wealth of the two thousand years of experience of the Church, the history of her encounter with other cultures, methods of conversion and of evangelization, the factor of christendom, colonialism and controversies, were all background knowledge that influenced the Second Vatican Council⁶⁵⁵. All these, in part, account for why ecclesiology is polemical today. This is because of dogmatic orientations about the Church and culture since the end of Vatican II.

Culturally speaking, these orientations have given rise to the transition from the previous integralist missionary approach to an enculturative⁶⁵⁶ one which recognizes that the Gospel is to be preached to different people in different circumstances. This facilitates the incarnation of the Church in each culture. The Church of Christ became what Onwubiko calls “the Biblical good Samaritan who does not pass by the wounded world, but with the “medicine of mercy” has begun that most needed healing of the world pastorally”⁶⁵⁷.

In this pastoral perspective, the Church was clear to declare that:

“The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or are in any way afflicted, these too are joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ”⁶⁵⁸.

This implies that the Church can be present in cultures where she has not been through evangelizing them, and that she can remain present in evangelized culture through reading the signs of the times.

In this chapter therefore, we draw together all the concepts and conclusions that were highlighted in the previous chapters on inculturation. It is by so doing that we chart a path to a

⁶⁵⁵ Cf. Onwubiko, O.A., Theory and Practice of Inculturation, Nigeria: SNAAP Press, 1992, p.92.

⁶⁵⁶ Substitute for socialization.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁸ G.S. 1.

distinct proposal and recommendation for the pastoral care of Yoruba Christian families at all levels. Thus, a reflective inculturated Yoruba marriage-rite based on a tripartite coagulation model is arrived at as the way forward in the integration and incarnation of Yoruba marriage practices. Our recommendation here thus suggests at least three postures from which the conversation between the religious tradition and Yoruba cultural information might begin, namely: the religious tradition in a way challenges the culture; the religious tradition is challenged by the culture; and the religious tradition uses the resources of the culture in pursuit of its own religious mission.

6.2 Culture and Gospel

In every age the community of faith must discover the shape of its ministry. We must discern how we are to be faithful to the gospel and effective in our mission. Before delving into the importance of cultural revival and Gospel integration with special reference to Yoruba society, it is pertinent to briefly define our terms "culture" and "Gospel" as it is used in the context of this thesis.

Definition: After much analysis of various definitions on culture as Cultural Anthropologists have not been totally precise, or totally consistent, in their usages of this crucial concept, Linton concludes that culture is "the sum total of knowledge, attitudes and habitual behaviour-patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society"⁶⁵⁹.

In other words, culture is an adopted human behaviour to the environment of a group of people sharing the same geographical and social experience. Such response can be physical, rational or spiritual.

Culture is sometimes looked upon as a means of solving problems, for satisfying needs, for adjusting to an environment and to other people. It is seen as a kind of roadmap made up of various forms designed to guide people to their destiny⁶⁶⁰. Culture gives someone a sense of belonging and identity; it moulds the personality of the individual and makes it possible to distinguish somebody of one group from another. This implies that although an

⁶⁵⁹ Linton, R., "Acculturation" in R. Linton, ed., Acculturation in Seven American Indian Tribes, Gloucester: Mass and Peter Smith, 1940.

⁶⁶⁰ Cf. Kraft, C.H., "Christianity in Culture" in Communication Theory for Christian Witness, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983, p.113.

individual can flee from his community he can not totally discard his culture for, as Nwachukwu Iwe says:

“Culture serves as the “stamp” or “trade mark” that distinguishes one society of people from another”⁶⁶¹.

It is against this background that John Paul II affirms that “we discover ourselves on the ground of culture, the fundamental reality which unites us”⁶⁶². And so we can conclude with the Fathers of Vatican II that it is one of the properties of the human person that he/she can achieve true and full humanity by means of culture⁶⁶³.

Gospel: The gospel is described as the good news conveying the meaning and purpose of creation and man’s destiny as revealed by God and accomplished by Jesus Christ⁶⁶⁴. Our objective here is to see the response of the Yoruba marriage practices to this divine intervention in our history.

Since culture by its very nature is dynamic and ever-changing, it is most pertinent for this thesis to engage in a dialogue of observation, studying and knowing how to inculturate the gospel into the religious culture and values of the Yoruba. We need to respond to the message of the gospel as has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters and field work in Yoruba mode of vision, expression, art, literature and thinking which mark their identity and distinguish them as a people. It is from such thinking that a response can emerge using African theology and the codification of norms in line with the Christian moral and dogma⁶⁶⁵.

6.3 Gospel and Inculturation

Having defined the term “Gospel”, we look at the import of the term “Inculturation” again.

⁶⁶¹ Iwe, N.S.S., Christianity and Culture, Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1975, p.18.

⁶⁶² Cf. John Paul II, Address to Unesco, June 2nd, 1980, No.10.

⁶⁶³ Cf. G.S. No.53.

⁶⁶⁴ Fagun, M.O., "African Inculturation of the Gospel" in Shalom, Op. cit. p.115.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

The term inculturation, which has become a household term in theological circles in Africa today, invariably evokes the idea of modelling Christian practice along the lines of the indigenous culture⁶⁶⁶. In other words, it is a creative encounter between the African thought-system and the European-Christian thought-system⁶⁶⁷. This encounter has its background and origin in the attempt of the early missionaries to interpret the Christian message in terms of African concepts seeking to integrate Christianity with African life and thought⁶⁶⁸. With the encounter, various African scholars have since tried to see Christianity from the living experience of the Africans⁶⁶⁹. Thus, in the spirit of this movement, indigenous names are being preferred to foreign saint names at baptism, liturgical vessels and vestments modelled after patterns found in the traditional culture. However, this is only one aspect of inculturation. As Justin Ukpong rightly pointed out:

“For, so long as inculturation has to do with interaction between Christianity and culture, it must be seen to mean not only Christian practice being modelled after the indigenous culture but also culture being influenced by Christian faith; and so long as culture has both religious and secular aspects, such influence must be seen to extend not only to the religious aspects of culture but to the secular aspects as well”⁶⁷⁰.

⁶⁶⁶ A lot of African scholars or writers on African theology like Ukpong, J.; Uzukwu, E.E.; Ndiokwere, N.I.; Onwubiko, O.A.; Buhlmann, W.; and Shorter, A. have written much on Inculturation from different perspectives of the Church's life that have become a benchmark for other writers and scholars.

⁶⁶⁷ Ukpong, J., "Theological Literature From Africa" in *Concilium*, 199(1988), p.67.

⁶⁶⁸ See, for example, *Vie Semaine de Missiologie* (Louvain 1982) which carries various articles on the nature of Christian reflection on African religious thought.

⁶⁶⁹ Cf. Chapter One on preamble to the thesis.

⁶⁷⁰ Ukpong, J., "The Nigerian Church and the Challenges of Inculturation", Op. cit. p.122.

In other words, inculturation must also be seen to mean bringing Christian influence to bear upon the secular aspects of culture like politics, economy, and interpreting Christianity in the light of culture. This is the *holistic* understanding of inculturation.

Thus, we have theological adaptation or inculturation, liturgical adaptation or inculturation, missionary adaptation or inculturation. This chapter deals with the last-liturgical inculturation in a missionary situation, with particular reference to Yorubaland.

One of the important factors in evangelization is that the missionary does not preach to nothingness. The glad tidings, to be good news, has to be preached to and received by a people as Gospel; that is, an event which transforms the world of the hearer. In order to be changed, the world of the hearer must be challenged in dialogue. Saint Paul tried his hands at it among the Athenians with little success and a dubious procedure - identifying his God with the unknown god (Luke reducing to the singular the altars to the unknown gods of the Athenian pantheon)⁶⁷¹.

The Fathers of the Church were more deliberate. Despite their rhetoric against paganism, they accommodated Graeco-Roman values: e.g. the 'pagan heart' was naturally Christian; Christianity is the true philosophy; Stoicism, Platonism, Aristotelianism, etc., sharpened the Christian doctrinal controversies; there was an eagerness to confirm Christian doctrine from the Sibylline oracles, and so on⁶⁷². The missionary enterprise could have failed were Jewish cultural forms imposed on Roman society. Rather, the converts were at home in their world, were converted in their world to become the "soul of the world". The message then becomes a leaven in the mass - the culture is evangelized.

In considering the level of liturgical inculturation therefore, we can distinguish two levels of meaning. The first, which is also the traditional meaning, implies the introduction of local elements into the liturgy. Thus the Mass and the sacraments are celebrated in the vernacular, traditional music and musical instruments are used in the liturgy. This level of meaning is signified by "indigenization", that is making the liturgy resemble the indigenous

⁶⁷¹ Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 17: 22ff.

⁶⁷² Justin and Athanagoras in the second century, and Clement, Irenaeus, Origin, Tertullian, and Minucius Felix in the third, were students of their own cultural and philosophic traditions. That they knew the main elements of the Platonic, Peripatetic, Stoic and Neo-Platonic teaching on sexuality and marriage for example, is evident in their writings.

culture. The second level of meaning is signified by “incarnation” and “Christianization”, which implies that a local custom is taken over by the Church and given a Christian content and thus the Christian message becomes “incarnate” in that culture⁶⁷³.

The question may be asked: Is inculturation really necessary? The first answer from the point of this study is that the practice of inculturation is in accordance with what we find in the New Testament. Jesus himself used the symbols and elements of his Jewish culture in communicating the good news to his mainly Jewish audience⁶⁷⁴.

At a theological level, the event of Pentecost⁶⁷⁵ whereby all the people who listened to the disciples were able to understand what they said in their own languages clearly shows that the good news is meant to be understood by all peoples in their own languages. In Matthew 28:19, in an account of the post-resurrection appearance, Jesus enjoins the disciples that as the Father had sent him he was in turn sending them to go out to the world and proclaim the good news of the kingdom, and make disciples of all nations. The same injunction is found in Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:9-10 and the Acts of the Apostles 1:8. It is to be noted that in fulfilling his mission, Jesus expressed the good news of God’s salvation within the context of the culture and life experience of the Jewish people among whom he exercised his ministry. The implication of this is that similarly, the disciples of Jesus would fulfil their mission by making the good news part of the culture and life context of the people to whom they would preach. That this was the case with the first Christians is clear from the fact that when Paul carried the Christian message to the Gentiles, a new interpretation of Christianity emerged whereby, through faith in Christ and baptism, Gentiles could be admitted into the Christian fold to share the full blessings of Abraham without being required to undergo circumcision⁶⁷⁶. Thus the practice of inculturation started with Jesus himself and the early Church in fulfilment of Jesus’ mandate.

⁶⁷³ Cf. Ukpong, J.S. Op. cit.

⁶⁷⁴ For example in the Synoptic Gospels: Matt. 13:1-9; Mk. 4:1-9; and Lk. 8:4-8, Jesus uses the symbols of a sower and seed to describe the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven to his Jewish audience of his time.

⁶⁷⁵ Acts 2: 1-13.

⁶⁷⁶ Gal. 3:1-29.

Secondly, the history of the development of the Catholic liturgy is full of how rites, gestures and words; etc. were taken over from pagan worship. In "*Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy*", Newman has demonstrated how the early Church adopted existing rites and customs of the populace at the time. He opined:

"The rulers of the Church from the early time were prepared, should the occasion arise, to adopt, or imitate, or sanction the existing rites and customs of the populace"⁶⁷⁷.

He further asserts that it is common knowledge, that:

"the use of temples, and these dedicated to particular saints, and ornamented on occasions with branches of trees; incense, lamps, and candles; votive offerings on recovery from illness, holy water; asylums, holydays and seasons, use of calendars, processions, blessings on the fields; sacerdotal vestments, the tonsure, the ring in marriage... and the Kyrie Eleison, are all pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church"⁶⁷⁸.

This shows that the very elements of the Church's daily and sacramental life integrated much from non-Christian religion and culture. If this had been the case at the very beginning of Christianity, to establish the reign of Christ in Africa means a start from the most basic elements of black culture in order to revitalize modern life.

The third answer follows from the second answer and that is, that our Christian faith is meant to be part of our life. According to Pope John Paul II:

"A faith that does not become culture is a faith that is not fully accepted, completely thought-out, and truly lived"⁶⁷⁹.

African culture is what gives meaning to the African's way of life. This ought to be integrated with Christian faith to have a Christian way of life that is African.

⁶⁷⁷ Newman, J.A., An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, London: Westminster, (1845) 1968 (eds)., p.529.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid. p.530.

⁶⁷⁹ John Paul II, "Letter of Foundation of the Pontifical Council for Culture", May 20th, 1982, AAS 74 (1983) pp.683-688.

6.4 Towards An Inculturated Marriage Rite - Church Wedding And Yoruba Traditional Wedding

In many parts of Yorubaland today there is fear that the traditional wedding celebration or ceremony may take the place of the traditional Catholic marriage rite. This fear is borne out of the responses gathered on the field from twenty-six different locations, people still regard Introduction and Engagement as valid and Church wedding as blessing. In Regina Mundi parish Church⁶⁸⁰, "as many as three thousand parishioners attend Mass on Sundays with only twenty-five percent receiving Holy Communion when in actual fact up to 75% are qualified to do so"⁶⁸¹. We found out that the reason hinged in part on irregularities in family life. Many are yet to rectify their marriages. A higher number are married traditionally, that is having completed the important stages and been pronounced husband and wife. After *Idana* (engagement), the wife is free to move in. Church weddings, in view of socio-economic encumbrances, have become very expensive. Even the new traditional wedding stops short of the Church celebrations but the people can cohabit and procreate once dowry has been paid and parental consent obtained.

Postponement of Church wedding provided for trial marriages. Sr. Bibiana, an informant and a parish pastoral assistant observed that:

"Many people today are going through trial marriages and that is why they did not want the Church blessings yet because once married, you cannot divorce and if they get along well, they can always come for rectification"⁶⁸².

Today many families prefer the celebration of both the Church and traditional marriage together. As far as they can see, substantially both the traditional and the Church wedding are the same and there is basically no need for separate rites. Therefore, to avoid duplications of marriage rites we would like to proffer a proposal for expedient joining of both the Church and the traditional rites together.

⁶⁸⁰ The researcher stayed in this parish and participated in their activities through participant observation and intensive interviews/conversations for the period of the field work.

⁶⁸¹ Response from interviews and observations among the parishioners.

⁶⁸² Rev. Sr. Bibiana, 34, Lagos, 1995 in her response to common pastoral problems and their causes.

6.4.1 Some Issues at Stake

We will briefly examine some likely theoretical and practical problems/issues that may arise in the creation and implementation of marriage rites for Catholics in Yorubaland. Some of the envisaged issues arise from our discussion so far in the thesis, such as:

(i) The awkward situation arising from the Church's regulation on the celebration of marriage which mitigates on traditional/customary marriage. Canon 1063 enjoins the Christian character among others in marriage, and a fruitful celebration of the marriage liturgy is enjoined in paragraph three of the same canon. The next requirement is the matrimonial consent treated in detail in canon 1095-1107. Then the crux of the matter is the form of celebration of marriage which comes up in canons 1108-1123.

The stumbling block here is the contracting of marriage before a legitimate pastor in canon 1108:1 and in the absence of one, a delegated lay person, as canon 1112:1 has stipulated, may receive the consent of the parties in the name of the Church. Further complication comes from canon 1118 which states that marriage is to be celebrated in the parish Church or in another Church or oratory with due permission.

Summarily then, a Christian marriage must entail (a) Christian concepts, (b) the ceremonials embedded in the liturgy, (c) where consent is freely and publicly expressed, (d) in a recognized Church and (e) before a witness of the Church, that is the pastor or his delegate as the case warrants.

(ii) There is a duplication of marriage celebrations. Both the traditional form and that of the Church are elaborate and expensive ceremonies. The people are trapped. They are left with no choice. The traditional marriage for all and sundry must be done and for every Catholic there is no way of avoiding the Christian marriage.

(iii) For practical purposes, there is the tendency for postponing the Christian marriage by some couples. There is the concept that the Church wedding is less important than the traditional marriage. The former is seen as only a blessing of an already existing marriage and therefore unnecessary.

On account of the issues or problems envisaged, in order to eliminate dichotomies, there is a need for a marriage rite that will take into cognisance the vision of marriage and the culturally-rooted marriage rites of the Yorubas. The rite will as far as possible eliminate the dichotomy and duplication of marriage rites so that Yoruba Christians can celebrate their marriage in a meaningful culturally relevant ceremony that is compatible with Christian doctrine and discipline. On this, Ndiokwere hit the nail on the head when he opined:

"What is needed therefore is not so much an adaptation of the Roman rite of marriage, by selecting elements of African cultures, and fitting them into this rite but a complete creation of an African Christian Rite of Marriage, which is fully African in its genius and cultural expressions and fully Christian in its fidelity to the message of Christ"⁶⁸³.

6.5 A Tripartite Coagulation Model

If faith is to be genuine and fully lived-out it must, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "become culture"⁶⁸⁴. The Church in Africa needs the faith taking root in Africa to be called Church. If the faith merely remains superficial, with its roots dangling in mid-air, the Church cannot be said to be present in Africa. It would be irrelevant to the African, the reign of dichotomy between faith and life, a juxtaposition of two parallel lines. On the other hand, a faith taking root in Africa would provide the foundation on which to build, to stand and to work⁶⁸⁵. It would give meaning to African life, provide answers for man's perplexities; comfort, assurance and release from anxiety. It would equally influence the development of the other African institutions like politics, economy and even recreation.

But to plant the faith without integrating African culture into Christianity, would be to create a parochial faith of at best a continental religion, a re-enactment of the drama of Babel⁶⁸⁶, a closed in, destructive system. The Church in Africa built on such faith would soon wither away and die, starved of the energising influence of a universal belonging. To facilitate this process of integrating the particular Churches into the universal, there must be a personal exchange program. This exchange must be borne out of theological reflection involving a correlation of the two main facets we have been discussing so far, namely, cultural experience and Church's tradition, ambiguity and disagreement abound concerning the meaning, content,

⁶⁸³ Ndiokwere, N.I., Op. cit. p. 135.

⁶⁸⁴ John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano*, (28th June 1982), pp.1-8.

⁶⁸⁵ Cf. Umoren, E.U., "Inculturation and the Future of the Church in Africa" in J.S. Ukpong et al., (eds.) Evangelization in Africa in the Third Millennium: Challenges and Prospects, Port-Harcourt: CIWA Press, 1990, p.69.

⁶⁸⁶ Gen. 11: 1-9.

and theological weight of each⁶⁸⁷. Aylward Shorter recognises this fact when he called for a recognition on the part of the Church of:

“A plurality of cultures whereby the Church can be looked upon as a ‘world Church’ instead of a culturally-imperial Church”⁶⁸⁸.

The delineation of a method of theological reflection thus chiefly consists in a definition of each part of the correlation and of the dynamic that moves the reflection toward its conclusion. Here, we will describe and propose a method that can not only be appreciated, but practically used by a range of ministers and evangelizers in Yorubaland when dealing with marriage and family life.

From the evidence on the field and as substantiated in the discussion so far, we propose a “Tripartite Coagulation model” of inculturation as a way forward in Christification of the African Church, recognising the polyethnic nature of cultures within the universal Church. In the pursuit of such a performable model our discussion has so far described a manner of reflection which seeks to correlate three sources of religiously relevant information.

Tradition is the first and obvious source for theological reflection. We take the source of tradition from both the Sacred Scripture and the history of the Christian Church, with its multiple interpretations of Scripture and itself⁶⁸⁹.

The second pole of reflection is the common human experience as we have seen so far from the Yoruba institutional experience of marriage and family life. Here we signify the specific experience of an individual in a society caught-up with the two poles of tradition and culture. Such concrete and immediate experience is, of course, a distillate of religious, cultural, and personal influence.

The third pole of the reflection, is the cultural information. By this, we mean the sort of understanding, conviction, or bias in the culture which contributes explicitly or implicitly to any theological reflection in ministry. From our study of Yoruba and their marriage and family practices so far, we have discussed how the pole of cultural information functions not

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. Whitehead, J.D., & Whitehead, E.A., Op. cit. pp. 11-12.

⁶⁸⁸ Shorter, A., Evangelization and Culture, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, p.82.

⁶⁸⁹ Cf. Whitehead et. al. Op. cit. p.12.

only as a secular or 'demonic' force to be overcome, but also at times as a force which confirms Christian insight or challenges the limitations of past formulations of Christian self understanding⁶⁹⁰. In line with the above discussion, the Synod of African bishops affirm that:

"Not only did the Synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the Church as God's Family as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa. The Synod Fathers acknowledged it as an expression of the Church's nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust. The new evangelization will thus aim at *building up the Church as Family*, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations"⁶⁹¹.

At the outset therefore, it must be recalled that in our reflection the goal is not simply a clarification of our historical understanding of a religious question. The goal is rather a pastoral decision, a ministerial response to a contemporary African situation found in the Yoruba marriage practices. Tradition, as we are using the term in this model of reflection, includes both the revelation found in the Old and New Testaments and those ecclesial decisions of the past two millennia which incline the minister toward certain pastoral responses rather than toward others⁶⁹².

This model of partnership sees the process of family integration from the stand-point of "the Church as family and family as Church" adapting the ecclesial organisational structures of doctrine and teachings on faith to the Yoruba traditional community structure of the same. This theory sees the vitality of the Church-as-family among the Yoruba insofar as all our Christian families become authentic domestic Churches. This theory therefore has its origin in the Blessed Trinity at depths of which the Holy Spirit is the Bond of Communion⁶⁹³.

⁶⁹⁰ Demonic here refers to some unhealthy traditional values of the Yoruba that needed to be redeemed. These abound in nearly every culture world-wide.

⁶⁹¹ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Op. cit. pp. 63-64.

⁶⁹² Cf. Whitehead, *et al.*, Op. cit. p.14.

⁶⁹³ Cf. "*Synodus Episcoporum Coetus Specialis Pro-Africa*. The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards

As a Paschal Community, the Church continues Christ's work of liberating the world of its sin and the consequent effects of anguish, fear, hatred and prejudice and divisions of all kinds. As Co-Creator with the Father, Co-Liberator with the Son and Co-Unifier with the Holy Spirit, the ecclesial community enters into a saving solidarity with the Blessed Trinity, and undertakes the task of moral, religious, psychological, socio-cultural and political liberation of man⁶⁹⁴. In other words, identifying its aim with that of Christ, the ecclesial community tries to achieve the integral liberation of man and to create a human community where Christ is all in all⁶⁹⁵.

It is for the Church-as-Family that the Father has taken the initiative in the creation of Adam. It is the Church-as-Family which Christ, the New Adam and Heir to the nations, founded by the gift of his body and blood. It is the Church-as-Family which manifests to the world the Spirit which the Son sent from the Father so that there should be communion among all. Jesus Christ, the only-begotten and beloved Son, has come to save every people and every individual human being. He has come to meet each person in the cultural path inherited from the ancestors. He travels with each person to throw light on his traditions and customs and to reveal to him that these are a prefiguration, distant but certain, of Him, **the New Adam, the Elder of a multitude of humanity which we are**⁶⁹⁶.

From our discussion so far on marriage and family life among the Yoruba, the extended family remains the sacred place where all the riches of our tradition converge. It is imperative therefore for this theory to bring to the heart of the extended family a witness which transforms from the inside our vision of the world, beginning from the spirit of the Beatitudes, without forgetting the various tasks that are ours in society. To this effect, we identify the Yoruba extended family strength from the points of hospitality, solidarity, warmth, human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust as benchmark which could help structure a new theological orientation towards evangelization. These are vital tools that must be put into use

the Year 2000 "You Shall be My Witnesses" in *Nuntius*, E Civitate Vaticana, 1994, p.9.

⁶⁹⁴ Cf. Mozia, M.I., Solidarity in the Church and Solidarity among the Igbos of Nigeria, Rome: Tipografica Liberit, 1982, p.276.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid. Article 24, p.10.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., article 24, pp.10-11.

in any evangelization process that must involve the life patterns of Yoruba Christians. These tools must be taken into consideration in any meaningful and incarnational evangelization by pastors. We will now reflect on some of these benchmark points.

6.5.1 Hospitality

The minimum that the African and especially Yoruba expects from his/her kith and kin is hospitality. This is done with open arms if he/she is being expected; and with a modicum of reserve if unexpected or unknown. He is therefore protected and adopted into the family.

This first step of the hospitality model does upset our more habitual model of evangelization embodied in 'Go preach the Gospel to every creature' - the preacher takes off and starts preaching. Our orientation prioritizes the community to be addressed by the preacher: "Wait! Something is happening! Something has happened before your advent! You are not on virgin territory, *tabula rasa*! Learn the language in the sense of creative symbol of a culture, otherwise, they would not understand your message that Christ is Saviour of the world"⁶⁹⁷.

The community receiving the stranger (missionary, carrier of the good news of salvation) takes the initiative. The stranger has found a home, a base! He is party to shared life; sharing in the life (world) of the host community. He is party to a dialogue which is started by the host community. Before he reveals what he is carrying in his heart (the good news of salvation), the pre-comprehension of his world (of which this good news constitutes the centre) is challenged. Before the traditional "Peace be to this house"⁶⁹⁸, the host community has manifested itself as "a son of peace" providing food, drink and shelter to the missionary⁶⁹⁹.

The bearer of the Gospel is hearing and living a "news" before his good news: the fragility of man, the precariousness of life, the need for solidarity and being bound to spiritual originators and allies. The stranger (missionary) experiences humanity; which for Africans is

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. Uzukwu, E. c.s.sp. "Missiology Today: The African Situation" in E.E., Uzukwu (ed.) Religion and African Culture, Nigeria: SNAAP Press Ltd., 1988, p.155.

⁶⁹⁸ Luke 10:5.

⁶⁹⁹ Luke 10:6-7.

never understood as parallel or in opposition to divinity, but rather compenetrates with divinity⁷⁰⁰.

The divine is being revealed in the day-to-day life experience of the host community before the arrival of the bearer of the Gospel, although this revelation may not be in the form of a revealed religion. The bearer of the Gospel has to understand this expected or unexpected "news" of the host community from the inside for there to be real confrontation between Gospel and the "news" of the host community. This takes us into the second stage of the hospitality model. The first stage stresses that any contextual theory of evangelization in Africa must start with recognition of divine revelation already operating.

6.5.2 Integration

Integration is not an easy exercise. There must be a serious and high-level cultural exchange in a milieu where one feels a stranger (*ex-patriate*). The advantage of the African hospitality model is that the receiving community has already facilitated the preliminary task of integration by welcoming the stranger (bearer of the good news). Though the receiving community maintains a distance vis-à-vis the stranger, its insistence on integration indicates that the doors are open to the stranger to understand as deeply as possible the values of his host community. For contextual theological reflection, this insertion and integration into a receiving community is a *sine qua non*. Without it theological reflection would remain superficial. For the bearer of the Gospel, the process of integration accompanied by reflection is already a new theology of evangelization in incubation⁷⁰¹. Failure to do this would produce a hurried superficial theology - mainly inadequate adaptation⁷⁰².

The integrated bringer of the good news goes to the heart of the community. His integration becomes a sort of *planting the seed which will sprout on African soil*, becoming the *leaven in the mass* - biblical images which are theologically defensible from the point of view

⁷⁰⁰ Cf. Uzukwu, E. c.s.sp. "Missiology Today: The African Situation" in E.E., Uzukwu (ed.) Religion and African Culture, Nigeria: SNAAP Press Ltd., 1988, pp.146-173, esp. p.163.

⁷⁰¹ Aylward Shorter stresses this aspect particularly in chapter six of his book Evangelization and Culture, "Evangelization from Below" Op. cit. pp. 139-159.

⁷⁰² Cf. Boulaga, F.E., Op. cit.

of the bearer of the message. This is incarnationism within a receiving community to allow his message to rock and be rocked by the very roots of the tradition of the receiving community. Being integrated, the stranger and his news stand a good chance of being fruitful - beneficial to the community of which he now forms a part⁷⁰³.

6.5.3 Contribution to the Community

This last stage in establishing the structures of a contextual theology of evangelization with the hospitality model, presupposes that the Christian messenger has already recognized divine revelation within his host community: an encounter between this community and God, generating the welcome of the other of which the Christian messenger is a beneficiary. This experience of hospitality falls within what Schillebeeckx calls "ethical expression of the inexpressible": "What God is must emerge from our unrestrained involvement with our fellow man, between one man and another, and through building up liberating structures without which human salvation proves impossible"⁷⁰⁴.

Secondly, we presuppose that the Christian messenger is already integrated within the host community, and is intensely familiar with the host community's foundational questions - the questions of "to be or not to be". What is happening during integration is that the bringer of the "good news" is already given and receives the community's "news" - the evangelizer is already evangelized. Paul VI's statement in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* aptly fits this situation: "The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself"⁷⁰⁵. In other words, the host community encountered at the level where the great questions of man, the world, God and the invisible hierarchies are posed is already raising questions for the bearer of the Gospel and his Gospel thereby directing the integrated stranger to the areas where his contributions would be apposite.

To avoid pre-fabricated theology, liturgy, moral, etc. the Christian messenger having taken the context into confidence must first of all confront, in his dialogue with his hosts, the questions the new context is raising. The challenge to the Gospel which the guest must confront in his dialogue with his hosts would be on the level of Life to Death - the nerve-centre

⁷⁰³ Isa. 55:10-11.

⁷⁰⁴ Schillebeeckx, E., Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord, New York: Seabury, 1980, pp. 59-60.

⁷⁰⁵ No.14.

of community myths and rituals like birth, puberty, fertility, affliction, death, etc. Around these, a plethora of questions would be addressed to the evangelizer to which he has no ready-made answers.

For the African, especially the Yoruba, the question of what becomes of the community in which he finds his place here and hereafter is fundamental. Sanon was confronted by a chief from the Upper Volta with the question: "If I pray on becoming a Christian through taking your baptism, would I still go to the home of my ancestors?"⁷⁰⁶. Bimwenyi quoted another elder who remarked to his sons, "You all wish to become Christians, who then, at my death, will take charge of my funeral rites and to whom would responsibility for our family customs be entrusted?"⁷⁰⁷. Such questions as above would then constitute a basis for constructing a contextual theology.

The question to be raised and the context to be created should not be seen as simply intellectual. The guest lives with his hosts, and the Gospel which he bears is communicated to his hosts as a contribution to life in the adopted community. He is this Gospel because his story, his ritual and his actions speak and mediate the good news to the adopted community. It is through the medium which has become the message that God who reveals himself in Jesus the Christ dialogues with the community. If supreme love is revealed through living with the guest, the host community will not fail to be attracted.

In order to achieve this integration effectively among the Yoruba Catholic Christians and perhaps of Africans, the proposed 'tripartite coagulation model' recognises three main bodies that should work together namely: the Church, the family, and the individual.

In this realm, we identify three corporate bodies/parties involved. They are: the Family Community, the Christian community and the individual/personage. It is these three corporate bodies that must come to work together in order to build the body of Christ - *the Church* that is truly African and Christian. The bench mark for this integration is the *Initiation Rite*.

⁷⁰⁶ Sanon, A., Tierce Eglise ma Mere ou la Conversion d'une Communauté païenne au Christ, Paris: Beauchesne, 1972, p.301.

⁷⁰⁷ Bimwenyi-Kweshi, O., "Religions Africaines, un 'lieu' de la Theologie Chretienne Africaine" in Religions Africaines et Christianisme, Colloque international de Kinshasa, 9-14th Jan. 1978, II, (1979), p. 195.

6.6 Initiation Rites as Commonality to Both Parties

Christian living focuses attention on life and death which is a major concern in African culture. The themes of birth, initiation, marriage, elevation and death are precious to the African soul. The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination, Marriage and Burial rite are appropriate benchmark subjects for the above cultural inculturation themes.

In Africa and especially among the Yoruba, religion precedes a man before he is born into the world, accompanies him throughout the stages of life, and follows him even after his physical departure from the world. In the cycle of life, there are the stages of birth, puberty, marriage, death and regeneration. Ikenga Metuh calls these phases “life-crisis rituals” because they are rites of passage which specifically celebrate the major turning points in the life of an individual in a community⁷⁰⁸. He points out further that if the activities associated with such ceremonies are examined in terms of their order and content, it is possible to distinguish three major phases: *separation, transition, and incorporation*⁷⁰⁹. Man moves from one stage of existence to the other and does not stay in one stage permanently.

Our theory is based on life that is characterised by movement; the integrated child, who may be regarded as a passive member of the society, moves from that stage into puberty or young adulthood, where the initiation rites performed usher him into adulthood. Then comes marriage, procreation, old age and finally death, which ushers the person into the land of the spirits. And to ensure that no breaks might occur between the various stages and that the transition might be smooth, elaborate religious rites are performed.

6.6.1 Birth

Birth is the beginning of the life cycle among the Yoruba community and indeed among Africans and it is celebrated with appropriate ceremonies to show its significance. As mentioned earlier, the Yoruba believe that human beings are formed by the divinity *Orisha nla* and after that *Olodumare* breathes air into them to give them life⁷¹⁰. Thus, the birth of a child

⁷⁰⁸ Cf. Metuh, E.I, African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation, Nigeria: IMICO Press, 1991, p.123.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁷¹⁰ Cf. Chapter two of the thesis on Yoruba mythology.

is an occasion for great rejoicing. The family offers thanks to *Olodumare* and expresses the wish that He may “number the child with us”⁷¹¹ - a wish that the child may not die.

“Three days after the birth of the child, a special ceremony is performed, when the oracle is consulted”⁷¹².

The ceremony, called “*The First Step into the World*”, is to find out, with the aid of *babalawo*, a priest of Ifa⁷¹³, what sort of child it is going to be, and to appoint for it a god or guardian spirit. After the father of the child has acknowledged it, the priest consults the Ifa oracle and declares which of the divinities the child should worship. He also pronounces what is forbidden or taboo to the child as earlier mentioned.

That the rite of naming the child is a rite of incorporation, writes Van Gennep, “need not...be demonstrated at length”⁷¹⁴. For the Yoruba, like for many Africans, to be is to belong.

In ascending order, one is in varying degrees a member of his patrilineal and matrilineal kindred, lineage, clan and tribe. These groups consist not only of the living but also the dead and those yet to be born. When a child is named, he is not only individualised, but also incorporated into society. The divination rite which precedes the naming ceremony is to establish his identity. The naming ceremony is to “effect his incorporation”.

The role of the participants of this ceremony cannot be over-emphasized. The mother's and the father's kindred - the two groups with whom the child will have the closest contact. His incorporation into these groups is symbolized by not only their presence and their exchange of gifts, but also the principal actors in the ceremonies. The wider society is represented by the attendants who express the baby's acceptance into the community by carrying him and presenting him gifts. The rite of holding out the child to the sky, the sun, and rain is a rite of incorporation into the cosmic realm. While the prayers to the divine beings for

⁷¹¹ Opoku, A., West African Traditional Religion, Op. cit., p.105.

⁷¹² An oral interview with Pa Ajayi, 65yrs, at Ile-Ife in March 1995.

⁷¹³ Ifa is the Yoruba god of divination.

⁷¹⁴ Gennep, V.A., The Rites of Passage, Translated by Vizedom, M., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960, p.63.

protection could also be viewed as a rite of incorporation into the cultic life of the community.

In short, to become a Yoruba is to join a community of people who believe in the traditions and values of the Yoruba culture.

6.6.2 Puberty Rites

The rites performed at birth by Yoruba society are meant to incorporate the child as a social and corporate being. When a child is given a name, it is acknowledged as a full member of society, and although it may be inactive then, it is potentially a responsible and active member, and society continues to give it the education that will lead to the attainment of that objective. The next important stage of a child's life is puberty or young adulthood, and the initiation rites that are performed at this stage continue the process which the birth rites began, to incorporate him into a fully-developed person, capable of discharging his/her duties as a full member of society⁷¹⁵. The initiation rites contain in them the ideals of manhood or womanhood which society wishes to instil into the young adults who undergo the rites.

Puberty rites among the Yoruba involve the seclusion of the young men and women away from one another for a period of time during which the instructions and the entire experience given them help to bring about physical, emotional and psychological changes in them. Their recognition of their personality of coming of age at this time signifies a rebirth into another stage in life, for they have been reborn into adolescence and adulthood⁷¹⁶.

6.6.3 Marriage Rites

Marriage as already mentioned, is such an important stage in African life that elaborate preparations in the form of puberty rites are made before young people enter into it. In puberty rites, the young are educated in matters of sex, marriage, procreation, family life and the responsibilities of adulthood.

The puberty rites do not prepare the young for marriage alone, they prepare them for procreation also; for, in African tradition, marriage and procreation are inseparable⁷¹⁷. The aim of marriage is procreation and without it marriage is incomplete. In begetting offspring one averts the threat of extinction, which is considered a calamity in African societies. Procreation is man's answer to death, for through it the losses inflicted on society by death are

⁷¹⁵ Cf. Opoku, A.K., *Op. cit.* p.112.

⁷¹⁶ Cf. Opoku, K.A., *Op. cit.* p.112.

⁷¹⁷ Cf. Mbiti, J.S., *Op. cit.* and Opoku, K.A., *Op. cit.*

made good⁷¹⁸. It is indeed a religious duty for man to produce offspring, so that the existence of humanity can be prolonged. Thus, the rite of marriage is equally an incorporation.

6.6.4 Funeral Rites

Death is the inevitable end of a person, but the attitude towards it is everywhere ambivalent. In general, Africans regard death not as the end of life, but as a transition from this present earthly life to another life in the land of the spirits⁷¹⁹. It is a journey according to Opoku "which man must make in order to reach the life beyond and continue to live as an ancestor"⁷²⁰. The dead, therefore, do not remain in the grave as earlier mentioned, but become spirits and proceed to the spirit world.

Funeral rites of the Yoruba focus not only on the deceased but also on his surviving relatives⁷²¹. They concern not only the society of the living but also the spirit-land of the ancestors. For the deceased, funeral rites make it possible for his spirit to reach the spirit-land.

Hence, the rites of incorporation feature prominently. For example, the dressing up of the corpse to look like a "spirit" is a rite of incorporation. So, too, is sacrifice to God to welcome him/her into the spirit-land. The wailing symbolises the announcement of his death, and consequently separation from the living. So too, the rites which rid him of his titles and the rites of absolution, are rites of separation⁷²². While, the lying in-state and the rites and objects given to him to facilitate his journey to the spirit-land are rites of transition.

For the relative, especially his wife, the whole period of mourning is a liminal period. Death has as it were disorganized the social and spiritual relationships which hold society together. The mourning period is both a period of chaos, as well as a period of re-establishment of new bonds. This is seen more clearly in the rites which surround the wife. For example, the seclusion is a rite of separation from the profane world of daily life. So are the ablutions involved. The whole mourning is a liminal phase for the wife and other close

⁷¹⁸ The Yoruba have the same belief in procreation as noted in the book of Genesis 1:28.- Be fruitful and multiply.

⁷¹⁹ Cf. Fagun, M.O., "African Inculturation of the Gospel" in *Shalom*, Vol.III No.3. Op. cit. p.118.

⁷²⁰ Opoku, K.A., Op. cit. p. 133.

⁷²¹ Facts collected from the interviews on the field.

⁷²² Cf. Metuh, E.I., Op. cit. p.135.

relatives. Their movements are restricted. They wear *'aso ofo'* (mourning clothes). The purification rites at the end of the mourning period and the ablution in the stream by the wife, are rites of re-incorporation into the society of the living. For the entire society the carnival festivity after the interment of the corpse, is a liminal rite. The gloom of mourning is suddenly turned into a show of joy. The whole celebration thus has cathartic effect on the community - helping it to tide over the fear and gloom of death. After the celebrations, the normal routine of daily life is resumed, with the assurance that death may have struck a heavy blow but it has in no way overcome the community.

6.7 The Religious Significance of Rites of Passage

One could analyse the religious significance of these rich data on Yoruba rites of passage from the perspective of the integration theory.

A quick look at the context of each of these rites of passage, shows that, for the participants, they are essentially religious rituals as they regulate not only social relationships but more profoundly, they regulate relationships between humans and the invisible world of spiritual beings and powers.

Hence Yoruba rites of passage, for the participants, are essentially religious rituals. This is not only because they occur in a religious world-view and therefore in a religious context, but also because they celebrate changes which are essentially interventions of the divine. Hence, rites which at one level symbolise change from one socio-biological state to another; at a deeper level, symbolise divine interventions to effect a change in the human condition. The large number of rituals with specific religious objectives like purification rites, sacrifices, fertility rites, protection and divination rites which occur in juxtaposition and combination with rites of passage, further bear out this fact. One of Mbiti's aims in his book *"African Religions and Philosophy"* is to show that:

"Traditional religions and belief are not primarily for the individual, but for his community of which he is part. Chapters of African religions are written everywhere in the life of the community, and in traditional society there are no irreligious people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinship's and in the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be cut out of the whole picture. Therefore, to be without religion amounts

to a self-excommunication from the entire life of the society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion”⁷²³.

The rites of passage therefore celebrate the belief that divine intervention shapes the course of human socio-biological development.

The African sense of communalism must be given new interpretation to function well in the development of the Christian theology in Africa. In the words of Mbiti, it may be said: “I am because we are and because we are therefore I am”⁷²⁴. This idea strikes the great chord of African solidarity and the sacredness of the human community. Kinship therefore plays an important role in the African concept of Christ - His person and His Church, the community of believers who hold a common allegiance. In fact, a careful understanding of African concept of man and community can open a fresh chapter in the theology of the Church. The clarity of this concept in evangelization is a self-evident proof of its importance.

In what follows, we shall examine the Christian rites of passage in the form of the various sacraments of the Church and then apply the idea of movement from below to the whole of evangelization. Evangelization originates in the Christian community from which the evangelizers themselves emerge, and from its midst⁷²⁵. When we reach this understanding, we realise at once that this is the key to successful evangelization and integration. From there we will develop the argument for a new model of Church, a model that pays attention to the Church of the grass-roots, and that guarantees a more effective evangelization. This will thus set in motion a fertile ground for inculturated Yoruba marriage rites and catechesis.

6.8 Christian Initiation Rites

To become a Christian is to join a community of people who believe that Jesus Christ brought eternal life into this world and who celebrate together their sharing in that life while

⁷²³ Mbiti, J.S., African Religions and Philosophy, London: Heinemann, 1969, p.1.

⁷²⁴ Mbiti, J.S., "Some African Concept of Christology" in Christ and the Younger Churches, Vol.12, 1972, p.51.

⁷²⁵ Cf. Shorter, A., Evangelization and Culture, Op. cit. p.139.

they are waiting for it to be fully realised when Jesus comes again⁷²⁶. Believing in life and celebrating the wonder of it is a good description of what it is to be a Christian and a member of the Christian Church.

Belief is brought about and expressed in word. Celebration is invited and expressed by rite. Christians are known as people of words: they have a story to tell about how God has given eternal life to humans and a doctrine about the meaning of the story. They are also known as people of rites; as people who come together for Mass or the Lord's Supper and who initiate new members ritually by baptizing and confirming them. But they would like to be known most of all as people of *life*. The word in which they believe is the word of life. The rites they practise are for the giving and celebrating of life.

The rites of initiation into the Christian community (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) are specially concerned with life because they mark the first giving of the fullness of life in Christ which is proclaimed and made available in the Christian community⁷²⁷. They cannot be life-giving in this way unless they are accompanied by the word of life: the story of the giving of eternal life has to be told to the initiates and the essential meaning of it explained. The story and the explanation must deal with the form and meaning of the rites, and with how they serve to insert human life into eternal life. It is the business of the theology of sacraments to provide such an explanation, so that the story can be told in relation to the rites in a way that makes them life-giving.

The interaction of rite, word and life is a common subject of study by the anthropological sciences⁷²⁸. Human life in all its spheres is full of ritual, and of words and stories and myths that go with the rites. The theology of sacraments can learn much from the sciences that study human ritual. Indeed, it has to learn from them and take account of their methods in its own methodology. Without calling into question in any way their divine origin as sacraments it has to respect their anthropological status as rites. It has to see them as instances of that irrepressible human instinct to imitate and dramatize things or events or persons that are important for human life, to remember and re-create them symbolically at certain times and in certain places. It has to allow for all that is known about how rites affect

⁷²⁶ Cf. Walsh, L.G., OP., The Sacraments of Initiation, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988, p.1.

⁷²⁷ Cf. Walsh, L.G., OP., Op. cit. p.1.

⁷²⁸ Cf. Van Gennep, Op. cit.

critical moments of human life like birth and death, puberty and marriage, initiations into and affirmations of belonging to a social group in critical moments that are captured and held in a manageable way by rites, so that the life- experience and tension in them can be adequately dealt with. Birth and death, entry into adulthood, marrying, illness, buying and selling, political decision-making, the recurrence of the seasons and fertility of the earth are the kind of moments in the cycle of life that are solemnised by ritual. A theology of these rites will have to identify these moments and explain how the rite with its story allows people to deal with them.

The theology of sacraments is about the rites that are celebrated within the Christian community of the Church. Rites and stories hold communities together and point them towards their future⁷²⁹. As a group of people becomes self-conscious and protective about its identity, its stories and rites become official. The Birth, Baptism, and Death of Jesus Christ are very central to the worship, teaching and life of the members of the Christian Churches.

These are rites of passage. One has to go through the sacraments of initiation to be accepted into Christian societies as a perfect man or woman. On equal footing, one has to go through birth, initiation, marriage and death to be accepted in many African societies as a perfect man or woman. It is at this stage that one is really accepted into the community of the living and later on, of the dead. These aspects of Jesus' life attract the African Christian. Christ actually fulfils the conditions of a perfect member of the community.

6.8.1 Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist & Marriage

Baptism is a sacrament of incorporation into the community of Christians. Baptism is the conscious and blessed beginning of the Christian life, a new birth and re-birth in the image of Christ, accomplished by the rite of bathing in water⁷³⁰. It is the entrance to all the sacraments, the gate to Christian life and hence to the eternal life which is its ultimate, eschatological consequence. Baptism blots out original and all personal sins, makes the Christian sharer of the divine nature through sanctifying grace, gives the adoption of sons, calls him and entitles him to the reception of the other sacraments and to share actively in the priestly adoration of the Church⁷³¹.

⁷²⁹ Ibid. p.3.

⁷³⁰ Cf. Rahner, K., Encyclopedia of Theology, London: Burns and Oates, 1975, pp. 66-77.

⁷³¹ Ibid.

The baptismal ritual or liturgy entailed in the early Church, a lengthy catechetical preparation of the candidates; next an immediate preparation of fasting, prayer, and solemn promises; then the solemnity of baptism itself. In this ritual, there is purification. Washing of water with the word cleanses Church⁷³²; as this pure water sprinkles the body it cleanses our hearts from an evil conscience⁷³³. Sharing in Christ's death, being purified in the sacred waters that flow forth from him, brings about fellowship with the living Christ, a new life; one is a new creation, born again, enjoying even now a share in his resurrection that will be perfected in the eschatological future when the Lord returns.

When we reflect on this plenitude we perceive that baptism is indeed "the blessed sacrament of our washing in water", the foundation of a high-minded life, life in Christ Jesus; for "our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body"⁷³⁴. Baptism calls us to abide in love to which and in which Christ has called us, bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ⁷³⁵. A person is therefore baptized in a particular Christian community - normally a parish which takes responsibility for the sacrament and registers it. The rite is thus celebrated by that community, gathered under the presidency of its ordained ministers, one of whom does the actual baptizing⁷³⁶. One or more members of the Church sponsor the person to be baptized and take special responsibility for him or her.

From the discussion so far, Christian Baptism is such a rite of passage or initiation. One is joining something, starting to keep new company, thinking and feeling differently about certain things; even if the rite is simple, the issues are serious.

In summary, baptism is a work of God, in which he realises his intention of giving salvation and the forgiveness of sin to all humankind, by incorporating into Christ, through regeneration in the grace of the Holy Spirit, and adoption to divine sonship those who believe in the Gospel and are converted from sin; this work is realised in and through the Church which is the community of those who proclaim Christ's death and resurrection and re-enact it

⁷³² Ephesians 5:26.

⁷³³ Heb. 10:22.

⁷³⁴ Phil. 3:20-21.

⁷³⁵ 1st Cor. 15:28.

⁷³⁶ Walsh, L.G., *OP.*, *Op. cit.* p.65.

in a water-rite that, as a sacrament, signifies and effects regeneration, incorporation and adoption by Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, are the three sacraments of Christian initiation, which make up together the fullness of Christian life, by the consecration and mission which they confer. Hence, the three sacraments according to Rahner, since they communicate the saving action of the Father in the Son through their Spirit, must necessarily be considered in their organic unity. The sacraments bestow on us all the "gift of the Holy Spirit"⁷³⁷. Eucharist is the designation for the sacramental meal of the Church celebrated according to the example and instructions of Jesus. In these sacraments, there is reference to the cycle of life and death of Jesus and its implication for the Christian community brought together in Christ.

The rite of Confirmation and Eucharist also, whether as part of a continuous initiation or as separate celebrations, are meant to take place in a full assembly of the Christian community into which the person is being initiated. They are presided over by the bishop or a priest. The reception of both sacraments like baptism are accompanied by sponsors who present them and take responsibility for them before the community.

In the rite of Christian marriage too as we have seen from our discussion in Chapter four, marriage commitment is primarily to a community. The commitment in marriage to community implies that the impersonal as well as the personal, the objective as well as the subjective, become the object of discourse and of life's energy. One develops a relationship not simply as an intimate relation to a private other, but rather as a community of intersecting relationships and interests⁷³⁸. The reception of marriage sacrament is equally accompanied by sponsors who stand by the couples and take some responsibility alongside the Christian community.

6.9 African Values for Christianity

We have seen the high degree of interest the two described communities play (Christian and African) in the initiation rites of the would be members of the society. They regarded the success of each member of the group as their co-operative success, and the failure

⁷³⁷ Rahner, K., Op. cit. p.277.

⁷³⁸ Cf. Fiorenza, F.S., & Galvin, J.P., Op. cit. p. 659.

as their corporate failure. It is from the springboard of community solidarity that our tripartite coagulation theory of evangelization take its course.

In this realm, this great African value is developed and being used as a litmus test for inculturation theology among the Yoruba Christians and indeed among Africans. Our major aim of this theory which is of paramount importance is the task of Christianity in making the Gospel relevant to the African and especially the Yorubas, and what Christianity has to learn from the African cultural values and practices. Mbiti has noted that:

“A great number of beliefs and practices are to be found in any African society. These are not, however, formulated into a systematic set of dogmas which a person is expected to accept...In traditional religion there are no creeds to be recited; instead, the creeds are written in the heart of the individual, and each one is himself a living religious creed of his own religion. Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being. It is this that makes Africans so religious: religion is in their whole system of being”⁷³⁹.

Many missionaries in Africa also addressed themselves to this problem. For example, it formed the main subject of Aylward Shorter's: “African Culture and The Christian Church”.

He treated important themes such as: African Religious Ideas and the Encounter with Christianity; African Values in Christian Catechesis; African and Christian Ritual⁷⁴⁰. In his “A Priest in the Village”, he showed, with concrete examples, how a Christian could be helped to live his faith practically in his culture and in his immediate environment.

The African values of community living must therefore be theologically interpreted and applied in Africa and especially among the Yoruba Christians as authentic Christian and ecclesial values. In a more constructive way, this theory proposed is going to employ the values of African solidarity and communalism on the initiated person and the two communities to which he is initiated.

Having been ontologically and religiously bound together, the members of the community recognise their God-given duty to *preserve* and *transmit* these inherited values of solidarity and communalism from one generation to another. The consciousness of this

⁷³⁹ Mbiti, J.S., African Religions and Philosophy, Op. cit. p.3.

⁷⁴⁰ Shorter, A., African Culture and the Christian Church, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978, (1973).

educational task binds the people together to work hand-in-hand to educate their children to live the same solidarity of life among themselves and with all in their community. Such a common bond, which fills them with the strong sense of responsibility, reveals itself in the aim, the content, the means and the method of their traditional education.

The aim of education in any given society depends on the specific goal set up by that society, and such a goal reflects its concept of man and his world. For example, a materialistic and utilitarian society will aim at educating its members to achieve a socio-economic success without any reference to the transcendental values. Thus, judging from all that has been said so far about the Yoruba ethico-religious dimension of solidarity, it will be readily understood that the principal aim of education among them is to promote the dignity of man and to preserve their traditional values. Like the ancient Romans, whose fundamental idea of education was to train the young to respect and uphold the inherited customs of their ancestors⁷⁴¹, the Yoruba train their children to love, respect, and appreciate all the religious and cultural values. The emphasis is fidelity to God and their ancestors who have given them the injunction to lead a life of solidarity. Thus the Yoruba educate their children so that they can develop all their potentialities, in such a way that, imbued with the communitarian spirit, they could participate in and contribute towards the solid growth of the community. Such an aim is better comprehended from the name given to a child as a gift to the community (*Ebun-Oluwa*)⁷⁴². Thus the child is first and foremost seen and trained to live as a gift to the community to promote the bond of unity in the community in which he or she lives.

This common aim of educating a child to a life of solidarity helps to unite the adult members of the community, summoning all of them to collaborate in training of the children to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors. Through the process of socialisation and acculturation, a child is introduced into the community and trained by the members of the nuclear and extended family to recognise its value and role in the community⁷⁴³.

Among the Yorubas as already mentioned, a child is not normally referred to as "my child" (*omo mi*) but as "our child" (*omo wa*). This shows the child from the start that it

⁷⁴¹ Cf. Marrou, H.I., History of Education in Antiquity, London: Sheed and Ward, 1977, p.231; Bujo, B., African Theology in its Social Context, Op. cit. p. 44ff.

⁷⁴² Cf. Chapter Five of this work.

⁷⁴³ Cf. Chapter Two, article on the role of the extended family.

belongs not only to the parents, but also to the entire community. This first impression is further confirmed by the common interest which every adult in the community shows in the child.

This process of education has a great psychological impact on the child. It offers the child security, imbues him with the communitarian spirit and makes him feel bound up with every member of the community⁷⁴⁴. This education to solidarity covers all aspects of the child's life. It includes the socio-economic, political and intellectual life which is integrated or unified by their religious dimensions. By participating in the different aspects of the community life, the child is trained and introduced to the whole life of the community.

Because of this solidarity-nature of the Africans, some scholars of cultural psychology today describe the African traditional society as an 'inclusive' society. Inclusive societies, they say, are those which are governed by the principle of "both and", instead of "either or", in their survival thrust⁷⁴⁵. The high valuation of community and the desire for more people in traditional African societies is therefore not to be interpreted from a purely materialistic or economic point of view. The philosophical dictum: "the more we are, the bigger I am", far from being an economic principle, is the statement of a fundamental option for the Africans⁷⁴⁶.

Hospitality, as already mentioned, is a widely-acknowledged African virtue from which flows the African spirit of solidarity and inclusiveness⁷⁴⁷.

A keen sense of sacrifice is consistent with the African spirit of solidarity. The strong emphasis on community presupposes a prior acceptance of a degree of individual sacrifice whenever the need arises - so that others may live, so that others may eat, so that others may have joy, and so on.

⁷⁴⁴ Cf. Mozia, M.I., Op. cit. p.238.

⁷⁴⁵ Baldwin, J.A., "Notes on an Africentric Theory of Black Personality" in The Western Journal of Black Studies, Vol.5 No.3, 1981; The same author, "Psychology of Black Americans" in The Western Journal of Black Studies, Vol.9 No.2, 1985.

⁷⁴⁶ Cf. Ehusani, G.O., Op. cit. p.222.

⁷⁴⁷ Cf. Fagun, M.O., "African Inculturation of the Gospel" in Shalom, Vol.III, No.3, Enugu, Nigeria: CECTA Nig. Ltd., 1985, p.120.

On the part of Christianity, the unique nature of the ecclesial community lies in its trinitarian origin⁷⁴⁸. Thus by revealing this mystery to men, God invites them to participate in the life of the blessed trinity and to share this life among themselves. Thus the Church is made up of all those who through faith and baptism are explicitly committed to this trinitarian life. Each member freely and personally enters into a covenantal relationship with God and with all the believers. This, therefore, forms a basis for solidarity in the Church. All the ministries and various organs of the Church are given for the one purpose of building up the ecclesial community after the example of the trinitarian community.

The first obvious conclusion here is that both the ecclesial community and the Yoruba community have a *common theocentric basis* for their solidary life, that is, their faith in the one Supreme God; although there are some dissimilarities in their mode of acceptance, which we have mentioned earlier. In the light of this similarity, the Church is thus called here to consider how it can help the Yorubas to purify and perfect their concept of the Supreme God so that they can arrive at the knowledge of the Christian God who should become their new and complete basis for solidarity.

Christianity again identifies with the Yoruba spirit of solidarity with its emphasis on *love*. By putting himself on the side of the weak members of the society, Jesus confirms the African virtues of hospitality to strangers, service of the sick, attention to widows and orphans, and respect for the aged, which are celebrated in many folk-tales and legends that tell of the triumph of the weak against the strong⁷⁴⁹. The African sense of sacrifice - "so that others may live", receives the greatest confirmation in the vicarious suffering and death of Christ, so that all may have eternal life⁷⁵⁰. But with its message of the Universal Fatherhood of God, and therefore the brotherhood/sisterhood of all men and women of all races and nations, the Christian message challenges the African to abandon all narrow clannishness and ethnocentrism, and expand his or her idea of 'family' and 'community' to include other clans, other language groups, other nations, and other races, under the headship of Jesus Christ, the 'Proto-Ancestor'⁷⁵¹.

⁷⁴⁸ Cf. Mozia, M.I., Op. cit. pp.39ff.

⁷⁴⁹ 1st Tim. 5:1-25.

⁷⁵⁰ John's Gospel Ch. 6:60-71.

⁷⁵¹ Bujo, B., "Can Morality Be Christian in Africa?", in African Christian Studies (C.H.I.E.A), Nairobi, March

The Yoruba and indeed the African concept of man as a gift to the community forms a good basis for presenting Christ as the perfect Man and the perfect gift from the Father to the human community, whose main mission is to unify all men and women into the one family of a common brotherhood. If the Church is able to present Christ in this way, the people should be able to understand the moral implication of accepting Christ, and this involves entering into a saving solidarity with him and consequently collaborating with him and with all men and women of goodwill in building up a type of gift-shared solidarity, where every individual contributes his or her unique gift for the growth of the community.

The point raised above brings us to the crux of the matter. This concerns the unique and irreplaceable position of the individual Yoruba Christian within the Yoruba ecclesial communities in the various parishes and dioceses in Yorubaland. As we have pointed out in chapter two of this thesis, many Christian laity in Yorubaland do not have sufficient opportunity to participate actively in the evangelical, pastoral and administrative life of the Church, because they are not trained to do so and are not educated to see themselves, as in the traditional communities, as *irreplaceable gifts* to the ecclesial community. They are made to remain passive and leave everything to the ordained clergy. It is our strong recommendation and suggestion here that, the structure of "Church-as-Family and Family-as-Church" following the Yoruba cultural background should be adopted as the way forward in the inculturation theology of family apostolate. They should be able through proper education to see themselves as irreplaceable gifts to Christ and his Church in the "Third Millennium", and this consequently would help to overcome the problem of passivism. In this way, they would participate more actively in the evangelical and pastoral life of the local Churches.

The educational and pastoral implication of this is that each Christian, and this includes the Church leaders, should be trained to see himself or her self as an *irreplaceable* collaborator with Christ and with all the believers in all aspects of the ecclesial life. The Synodal Fathers called for a profound education towards the theology of the Church as family when they declared:

"All this presupposes a profound study of the heritage of Scripture and Tradition which the Second Council presented in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. This admirable text expounds the doctrine on the Church using images drawn from Sacred Scripture such as the Mystical Body, People

1988.; Umoren, U.E., Anns o-Efik-Ibibio Personal Names, Owerri: Black Academy Press, 1975.

of God, Temple of the Holy Spirit, Flock and Sheepfold, the House in which God dwells with man. According to the Council, the Church is the Bride of Christ, our Mother, the Holy City and the first fruits of the coming Kingdom. These images will have to be taken into account when developing an ecclesiology focused on the idea of the Church as the Family of God”⁷⁵².

This will frequently call for a *communal discernment* of the different members of the ecclesial community in the various aspects of the missionary activities. The Holy Spirit has spoken and continues to speak through any member of the community whenever there is opportunity for dialogue and communal discernment. It is hoped that if such an opportunity is offered to the people on the basis of *Small Christian Communities*, on the levels of the parochial and diocesan councils, the faithful will be able to appreciate and utilise one of the important gifts to the community - the *gift of service/participation* whose lack of recognition has often been the cause of friction and misunderstanding between African traditionally-held tenets and Christian tenets.

There is a necessary means of expressing solidarity based on collaboration and complementarity. We are hereby proposing a parish community model based on the Second Vatican Council aspiration - *people of God/community of communities model*. This parish model sample depends upon regarding the Church as a community/family, and forming the local unit as a group with a four-fold purpose. It must be a community of worship, charity, apostolate, and witness⁷⁵³. With Vatican II, the emphasis in defining the parish moves away from territory, or hierarchical/administrative structures, to people and the quality of relationships that should exist between them for the common good. Mercy Oduyoye advocates this model but to be coined from the trinitarian perspectives of the sacraments. According to her:

“Our baptism into the name of the Trinity means that we should stand not for monarchies and hierarchies but rather for participation”⁷⁵⁴.

⁷⁵² Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, Op. cit. No.103, p.66.

⁷⁵³ Cf. Arbuckle, G.A., Earthing the Gospel, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990, p. 81ff.

⁷⁵⁴ Oduyoye, M.A., Hearing and Knowing, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986, p.143.

She goes further to assert that in God's economy we find a sharing of power and of responsibility. The result of the action is attributed to all three Persons. The unity that exists in the Trinity does not have simple analogies in creation; both the threeness and the oneness are different from anything we know in finite society⁷⁵⁵. Nevertheless the principles of analogy and of symbolic language allow us to hope that human society will at least try to get rid of the kind of distinctions that kill unity.

Our baptism into the name of the Trinity also means that we share Jesus' acceptance of solidarity with sinners that led him on the path of self-giving, not just on behalf of the baptized, but on behalf of the whole world. Through baptism we take part in the trinitarian economy toward the salvation of the whole world.

In the Eucharist we give thanks to the Blessed Trinity for creating, redeeming, sanctifying, and for all the other benedictions that creation receives at the hands of the Three-in-One. We give praise on behalf of the whole world, which God has reconciled to God-Self. In the anamnestic, the "remembering", aspect of the sacrament we focus specifically on God-the-Son; in the epiclesis, the "invocation", we pray to the Holy Spirit. In the Eucharist we demonstrate our faith in the unity and diversity that is God. In this act of worship we also find communion as Christians and a representation of the goal of salvation, namely the fulfilment of the Kingdom⁷⁵⁶. If this is so, then the Eucharist should mean that both the unity and the diversity that is the Church are God-given. Should we not emphasize diversity rather than division, wholeness rather than uniformity? The ability to sing the Doxology (Praise-of-God) depends upon our saying "Yes" to diversity.

The Vatican II model of Church, in choosing the phrase 'People of God' to describe the Church, the Council⁷⁵⁷ was repeating a powerful, scriptural metaphor, which emphasizes the community dimension of the Church rather than its institutional/hierarchical/geographical aspects. In the Church there are peoples of all nations, who have accepted faith in the crucified Christ, and they are one in the true People of God, the 'Israel according to the Spirit'⁷⁵⁸. In

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁷ Cf. 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church' in W.M. Abbott (ed.), The Documents of Vatican II, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966, Ch. 2.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

this realm, evangelization becomes most effective when it operates through interpersonal relationships. These relationships are to be found ideally in the family, through the mutual influence of marriage partners or of parents, children and the extended family. We evangelize through *ministry* and ministry is any service presented in charity for the building of God's kingdom, in the name of the Lord Jesus. So ministry, in this sense, is not restricted to ordained people (as we have seen it displayed in the life of the traditional Yoruba family in their traditional education inculcated to the young ones), as the hierarchical/power structure model of Church and the parish would have it. It starts from the family which is the basic Church.

Ministry, as we have defined it, is clearly evident in the early Church; the disciples find they have insufficient time for prayer and for the 'service of the world', because they are burdened with the task of distributing food to the poor⁷⁵⁹. So others are encouraged to come forward for this ministry. The gathering of money for 'all the needs of the saints' is seen as a 'holy service' or ministry⁷⁶⁰. St. Paul speaks of the ministries of healing, assisting and administering, which do not demand priestly ordination as a precondition⁷⁶¹. Provided the action is done for building the Church and in the name of the Lord Jesus, it is a ministry⁷⁶².

The new Code of Canon Law lends its weight to this model when it describes the parish as: "a definite community of the Christian faithful which is established on a stable basis within a particular Church"⁷⁶³. Instead of being delineated as a geographical locality, the parish becomes a people (pastors and other faithful) who together reflect on the Gospels/Church teaching and their implications for daily life. As such it becomes a community of experience with oneness of heart and mind based on faith, hope and love in Christ where they show effective concern for one another through acts of charity and justice and by celebrating their unity and their dependence on the Lord through worship, especially in the Eucharist as mentioned earlier. From here, they can then go out beyond themselves to proclaim the Gospel message of love and justice to a world that does not know Christ.

⁷⁵⁹ Acts 6:4.

⁷⁶⁰ 2nd Cor. 9:12.

⁷⁶¹ 1st Cor 12:28.

⁷⁶² Mk. 8:35; 10:29.

⁷⁶³ Canon 515.

In spite of all that has been said, community remains a privileged form of interpersonal relationship, and this in practice means some form of basic community. As we have seen, the sense of community among the Yoruba traditional society and Africa as a whole is more intense. It has already been pointed out in the second chapter of this study that the social networks are more characteristic of urban and suburban living than rural communities. While this is true, it is also the case that there is a greater measure of solidarity among the urban poor, which favours community-building.

Inculturation, as we have seen, is intimately connected with dialogue. It presupposes an ongoing dialogue with human cultures, traditions and religions. At a popular level the 'Church-as-Family and Family-as-Church' model must be engaged in such dialogue. Their members being proud of their positive cultural values will rub shoulders with people of other cultures and other faiths. They will encounter cultures and religions which may oblige them to carry out a discernment to discover what is of God - or indeed of Christ - in them.

A 'basic communities Church' is a Church in which basic Christian communities are found at the grass-roots in every parish. What makes this kind of Church so exciting is that it is opposed to a totalitarian model of Church. It is a model in which the tail can really wag the dog as it were⁷⁶⁴ - in other words, initiatives can and must really come from below. Moreover, its evangelization is effective for the reason that the apostolate of the laity is effective, namely because it is inserted in the actual life context of Christians, plus the fact that it is an instrument of the pastoral team. Structurally, the basic Christian community enjoys the benefits of both verticality and horizontality.

6.10 A Suggested Catholic Rite of Marriage

Having scanned through what the "tripartite coagulation theory" or in other words, the theory of "Church-as-Family and vice-versa" stands for, we will now proceed further to see how this theory can be a utilitarian tool in inculturation ceremonies of marriage among the Yoruba Catholic Christians of South-Western Nigeria.

"Indigenous" here refers to an arrangement which may produce a merger of the traditional and Christian rites of marriage or perhaps eliminate completely the present duplication of the liturgical and traditional forms of marriage. The option favoured here is the insertion of the Christian formula and a blessing within the customary marriage at home of the

⁷⁶⁴ Cf. Shorter, A., Evangelization and Culture, Op. cit. p.146.

bride by the priest taking off the process of inculturation from the point of view of the "Church-as-Family" putting into good use the positive values of Yoruba solidarity.

From our discussion and findings on the subject so far, the traditional Yoruba Christian family has a fertile environment for the realisation of the inclusivist ministries that embrace the lay persons on which most of the recommendations will turn. This line of thought is implicitly supported by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger when he said:

"it is also said that people should no longer be passive receivers of the gifts being a Christian brings. Rather, everyone should become an activist of the Christian life"⁷⁶⁵.

The need for this collaborative stance was reflected in the theme of the 1990 Synod of Bishops titled "*de sacerdotibus formandis in hodiernis adiunctis*"⁷⁶⁶, and commented on by Guzman Carriquiry⁷⁶⁷:

"Priests often limit themselves to being agents of worship, overloaded with old and new bureaucratic-ecclesiastical tasks...It is as if they still seek refuge within their own four walls while the parable of the one lost sheep among the ninety-nine in the fold is becoming dramatically inverted"⁷⁶⁸.

The issues involved here relate primarily to delegation of authority to lower level members of the Church - the family which is referred to by the Church as a "domestic Church", authorization and controls, job description and specification etc., all of which present a challenge to the *status quo*⁷⁶⁹.

⁷⁶⁵ Ratzinger, J., 30 Days in the Church and the World, Rome, 1990, p. 64.

⁷⁶⁶ This means the formation of priests in the present-day circumstances.

⁷⁶⁷ He was a lay member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity from Uruguay at the Synod.

⁷⁶⁸ 30 Days, Op. cit. p.8.

⁷⁶⁹ We have borrowed here the use of management terms to drive home the collaborative ministry that should exist between the Church of Christ in Nigeria and the members. See, Cooper, N., Developing Collaborative Ministry Within the Parish Team, Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1991, pp.27-38;

This proposal may equally be beneficial to the Church having seen the elaborate remote and immediate preparations that preceded traditional marriage in the third chapter of this thesis; and this was so because of the high premium placed on marriage and family life by traditional Yoruba communities.

Unlike the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the 1983 Code of Canon Law has a serious canon on preparation for marriage and even more, it has a serious statement on how to assist those already married to attain the ends of the marriage. For the Church realises that marriage and family life are very important for the well-being of the Christian community and the evangelization of society. Hence the Code proposes a variety of means of assisting and responding to the spiritual needs of those preparing for marriage. The canon⁷⁷⁰ enumerates some of them as preaching and catechesis adapted to the goals in view, and even the use of the media of social communications. The parties must also undertake personal preparation aimed at deepening their Christian life and commitment. To all this must be added a well-prepared and fruitful liturgical celebration of the marriage event. In addition, those already married must be followed up with well-planned and well-organised Church assistance in order to persevere and grow in their marriage⁷⁷¹.

So, the 1983 code has already given the legal guideline. It is then up to the pastors and the laity of the Church to collaborate in the effort to stress these points, incorporating the useful positive customs of the people with regard to the preparation for and sustaining of marriage and family life.

Matrimony is a social sacrament. This element should be evident in its administration by involving the extended family or a small Christian community. So the values in African traditional marriage can be made the basis for pastoral activity on marriage in this period of the new era of evangelization.

To this end, we strongly recommend five different stages towards the marriage ceremonies. These stages are: (i) Request and Response; (ii) Interview of the bridegroom-to-be; (iii) The Engagement which we now termed Marriage; (iv) Entertainment; and (v) Thanksgiving in the Church of the choice of the couple.

Frost, P.J. *et al.*, Organizational Culture, London: Sage Publications, 1985, especially Chapter 18.

⁷⁷⁰ Canon 1063.

⁷⁷¹ Code 1063.

6.10.1 First Stage: Request And Response

The first stage in the inculturation ceremony entails a request and response from the suitor or the bridegroom-to-be with his family to the family of the bride-to-be. The bridegroom-to-be writes a formal letter to the family of the bride-to-be requesting the hand of their daughter in marriage. This replaces the old intermediary role of informing the family of the bride-to-be as the role of intermediary is fast diminishing in Yoruba society today. Because of the collaborative partnership already existing between the traditional family community and the Church or Christian community, the parish priest and the Christian community of the bride-to-be should be informed too about the growing relationship between the couple-to-be towards marriage⁷⁷².

The request should be followed by response from the family of the bride-to-be inviting the applicant or suitor for an interview. The parish priest and his community should equally be informed of this interview and the proposed date which he should attend either personally or at least by proxy. In this regard, the marriage preparatory group of the Christian community of that parish should attend this function as a stepping function for the preparatory course. This preparatory aspect of marriage will later be developed in the course of this thesis. This is an appropriate time for the commencement of marriage enquiry through bans of marriage and counselling of the couple. This will be taken up fully when we come to the aspect of marriage preparation.

The summation of this first stage involves therefore, the three communities - the couple-to-be being the first party, the traditional family community - which involves both the groom-to-be's family and the bride-to-be's family, the Church community as deputized either by the parish pastor or those lay people entrusted with the collaborative ministry of marriage preparation. It involves a full participation from the onset by these various communities.

6.10.2 Second Stage: Interview Of The Bridegroom-To-Be

In this second stage, the bridegroom-to-be comes with his family to the family of the bride-to-be on the fixed date in their family compound for the interview.

⁷⁷² Among the Yoruba traditional community, marriage takes place in the family of the bride's compound and this tradition has affected the Christian Church whereby marriage ceremonies too take place in the Church of the bride and not of the bridegroom.

The young man and his family are first welcomed into the family of the lady here. Questions are put to both parties regarding their acquaintance, sufficient knowledge of each other, their origins, character and characteristics, their health conditions, their qualifications or preparedness to face life on their own and their social status.

Here the parish community delegates should discuss the spiritual aspect of marriage, their compatibility for life-long companionship, the canonical requirements and the pastoral conditions for marriage.

With the above requirements found satisfactory, a date is then agreed upon by all parties for the next stage which is the engagement.

6.10.3 Third Stage: The Engagement (Marriage)

The bridegroom and his relations come to the family of the bride on the jointly fixed day for this stage with presents as stipulated by the family of the bride. The presents represent what is formerly known as dowry. The presents may vary in content according to prevailing conditions and individual status of the bridegroom. The parish pastor or his deputy should be present with their rituals at the engagement ceremony. The Christian community represented by either the priest or the marriage preparatory group, while maintaining the structure and chief elements of the rite, should try to adapt the celebration to the circumstances of the place and the people involved.

The ceremonies then begin after the housewives in the home of the bride have confirmed the gifts from the bridegroom as satisfactory. It is after this interplay that the housewives present the bride for the required ceremonies.

The bride and the groom present themselves before the assembly in the family house of the bride. The interrogation of the bride and groom follows regarding their intention, preparedness to enter into marriage and consent. The gifts are then brought forward for what may be called offertory. They are once more inspected by the elders of the assembly.

After this inspection, the bride's father and some elders of his family on one part, the father of the groom and some elders of his family on the other, and the Christian community represented by either the pastor or his delegates counsel the covenanting parties in the form of a homily on what married life entails.

Prayer is then offered for the couple. The cultural prayers make reference to the items of gifts as inspiration to some goodness to come on the newly-wed.

As a sign of expressing their love today considering the impact of Westernization on the Yoruba family, the marriage ring is thus given as a sign of being engaged, that is wedded.

It is to be noted that the basic Christian community through the parish pastor or the marriage preparatory group shall take appropriate liturgical actions along the above ceremonies representing the Church adequately as required, such as in the interrogation, the homily, the prayers and blessings at the appropriate time.

Since a marriage certificate is necessary in carrying out their civic duties as citizens of the country, the marriage certificate should be signed and presented to the couple authenticating their legal status as married couples which could be presented and used in Church, offices, school and for civic obligations of legal structures.

6.10.4 Fourth: Entertainment

The fourth stage completes the ceremonies of engagement where all parties are treated to a big celebration marking the solemnization of an inculturated marriage. At this celebration, guests are entertained with eating, drinking and dancing. Celebrations play an important role of solidarity among the indigenous people. It is an occasion whereby they express their accent and unflinching support for the newly-wedded couple. The importance of African celebration was rightly observed by Pope John Paul II when he declared:

“In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best tradition”⁷⁷³.

6.10.5 Fifth Stage: Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving may be done at the Catholic Church of the choice of the couple. At this Thanksgiving Service, during Mass, they may if they wish, renew their vows of marriage in the Church before the officiating priest. It is to be noted that should there be any Thanksgiving, the couple should immediately proceed away on honeymoon without any further merriment or reception.

6.11 Comment

There is no doubt that the combined rite of marriage above would relieve many Christians of the financial burden of the present double-marriage ceremonies. There is no

⁷⁷³ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation - Ecclesia in Africa, Op. cit. p.45.

doubt that many young couples often put off the celebration of the Christian marriage at two different occasions or venues. While the Catholic faithful wait for the production and publication of an entirely Africanized form of the Christian marriage, it may not be out of place meanwhile to make use of what is available. It is hoped that other ethnic groups in Nigeria would welcome the new arrangement provided it was preceded by enough Catechesis.

What follows therefore, is to look at the way and manner couples are to be prepared for marriage. In other words, why marriage catechesis is necessary for an inculturated marriage among the Yoruba Christian and traditional communities.

One of the most pressing needs of an inculturated marriage rite in Yorubaland today is preparing the people adequately for Christian marriage.

The success of marriage inculturation and partnership, and the happiness, peace, and contentment it brings to the Christian families are of immense importance to the Church and to society as a whole. The aim of any successful marriage is to protect at all times the sacred character of marriage and enhance our own rich traditions of family living. It is for this reason that effort should be made to ensure a thorough pastoral preparation of couples for the sacrament, and a mature assessment of their readiness to undertake the very serious responsibility of marriage and family life.

The formation of good Christian families calls for a special and thorough catechesis starting at an early age for early Christians (basic Christian community) by presenting the good news of the family to Christians at every stage of their lives. This family catechesis should become 'a pastoral priority' in the new era of evangelization.

6.12 Guidelines for Catholic Marriage Catechesis

The guidelines will treat the following:

- (i) Aims of the family catechesis;
- (ii) Content;
- (iii) Pastoral agent to implement it ;
- (iv) Channels and methods of delivery;

An inculturated marriage preparation has to be seen and put into practice as a gradual and continuous process. We shall be employing the traditional systems of preparation namely the three main stages: remote, proximate, and immediate preparation.

6.12.1 Catechesis for Pre-Marriage period

The following are the proposed aims of catechesis for pre-marriage groups:

- (i) To deepen the Christian faith and religious knowledge of the youth.
- (ii) To teach the youth the meaning of Christian marriage and its demands.
- (iii) To prepare adequately those contemplating marriage.
- (iv) To help the youth understand human sexuality and its functions.
- (v) To prepare the youth for apostolic work of witnessing in society.
- (vi) To prepare the youth for matrimonial commitment as well as other vocations namely: the priesthood and religious life.
- (vii) To help the youth lead true and exemplary Christian lives in the light of the Gospel.
- (viii) To help the youth integrate African or Yoruba cultural values with Christian values in the context of the changing times and society.
- (ix) To impart Christian culture to the youth.
- (x) To help the youth in difficult situations; e.g. teenage unmarried mothers, to accept and live their situation in the light of the Gospel.

Young people should be taught Christian doctrine about marriage and family life and should be helped to understand the meaning of human sexuality. In youth catechesis, special emphasis should be laid on the various vocations in life: marriage, priesthood, and religious life.

6.12.2 Pre-Marriage Contents for Age Group: 9-15 years

6.12.2.1 Commitment

- (i) Commitment to one's family through membership, security, caring and traditional education such as listening to elders.
- (ii) Commitment to the poor and disadvantaged through charity, justice, loyalty and self-respect.

6.12.2.2 Responsibility

- (i) Children's role and contribution in the family, school, Church and society.
 - (ii) "Family life education" based on Christian values according to the age and status of the children.
 - (iii) Sex education to lead the children to respect their bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit.
- The children should be made aware of the functioning and proper use of their bodies.

6.12.3 Pre-Marriage Contents for Youth of Marriageable Age

The good Yoruba and African values treated in chapters two and three of this thesis are recommended for pastors, their pastoral assistants or the marriage preparation group as the basic contents for youths of marriageable age. In this respect, it will incorporate the following values⁷⁷⁴:

A) The cultural values and the beauty of life including respect for elders, solidarity, hospitality, co-operation, participation, sincerity and discipline.

B) Commitment and responsibility. The youth are to understand their individual or personal responsibilities, that is, respect for others and a concept of vocation. The commitment of the youth to the community will enable them to make the right decision. The following vital commitments must be pursued vigorously: the role of prayer and religious practice in home and family; the meaning of “sacramental grace” as applied to marriage; what it means to be ready for marriage; communication and compromise in marriage and family living; mutual helpfulness and sharing the burdens of life; personal development of man and woman through mutual help, what equality of the spouses does and does not mean in marriage; children as blessing and responsibility; the marriage partnership in our Yoruba or African sense; the extended family and in-laws; the meaning of trust among partners and how to foster it, including the management of their resources.

6.12.4 Agents for Pre-Marriage Catechesis

Generally, it is the responsibility of the entire Christian community at various levels and sectors; e.g. parents, sponsors, marriage counsellors (traditional and Christian), the extended family (including grandparents), bishops, priests, religious, Catechists, small Christian communities, teachers and elders, experts such as nurses, doctors; etc.

Pre-marriage catechesis can be channelled through the home or family, celebrations of fecundity as occasions of incarnating Christianity in African cultures, the small Christian communities, person-to-person, couple-to-couple, etc.

Children and youth of ages five to fifteen should be channelled through the family catechesis.

⁷⁷⁴ Pastors and marriage preparatory groups may adapt these values according to their own environment and the particular group concerned.

Family catechesis consists in the domestic Church of an entire family coming together to reflect upon various events, situations and aspects of life, interpret its total meaning and fulfilment. This they do both at human level and at the deep level of faith in the light of God's Word or the faith-experience of God's people in history. From here they discover God's presence in their life and respond to him according to his designs, both in prayer and worship, and in various activities of their life. The whole atmosphere of family life serves as means of God's presence and revelation, and can be the object of faith animation and education, and of faith-witness.

Since the family is the domestic Church and the parents are the first and best teachers of their children⁷⁷⁵, the parents should by their word and example be the first preachers of faith to their children⁷⁷⁶.

The finality of family catechesis is addressed to the parents, with the aim of maturing their faith-life as Christian parents. It should be geared towards intending to take the parents to a living experience of Christian life in the small community of parish or village, so as to awaken in them the sense of belonging to the Church and their culture. Family catechesis intends to Christianize the whole family, the couples and the children.

The vast majority of premarital preparation is conducted by clergy and to a lesser degree by volunteer lay couples. The attitudes and skills with which pastoral premarital work is approached is very important.

What follows is a brief consideration of the characteristics, attitudes and skill that is required of the pastoral premarital person.

Attitudes: Sent from the larger Church, the priest or lay person/couple, is present for and assists in the formation of the couple becoming Church, "the smallest individual Church"⁷⁷⁷, understanding themselves as ministers to each other, valuing service, freedom and commitment, struggling with differences and trying to avoid domination, making central the Word in their lives. Their marriage becomes sacrament daily as they turn in prayer and in deed to Christ, learning about themselves and the partner; in turn, they learn about Christ in their

⁷⁷⁵ LG. 11.

⁷⁷⁶ Cf. The Pontifical Council For the Family in The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family, London: CTS., 1996, pp.22-25.

⁷⁷⁷ G.S. No.52.

partner. Marital spirituality is perhaps symbolized by a triangular leg with each dynamically informing and being informed by the other. It is these attitudes that support pastoral premarital work.

Skills: How do these attitudes manifest in behaviours? What skills are needed for effective premarital pastoral work? We will try to list the essential skills necessary for effective pastoral premarital work:

Empathy is the ability to enter into another's world of feeling and meaning, hearing not only their words, but their person as well⁷⁷⁸. Empathy conveys *acceptance* and *understanding*, eliciting the worth of each person, and non-judgmental exploring and evaluating their world with them⁷⁷⁹. Empathy is born of *active listening* with both eyes and ears, attentive to how bodies convey messages about relationships, attentive to themes in thinking, feeling and behaving.

Exploration, not interrogation, is an honest effort to clarify and understand, and not simply assume what is meant. Helping the couple to explore and work on their differences is a skill well taught⁷⁸⁰. *Confrontation and challenge* is needed in the presence of misinformation or in response to discrepancies between your perception of the other and their own view of self, especially where strengths and gifts are not appropriated. *Good communications* are obviously foundational to effective ministry⁷⁸¹. *Self-disclosure* is appropriate especially when it is selective, focused, and models a way of being.

Parish lay couples with a "good marriage" are a largely under-used resource for pastoral premarital preparation⁷⁸². There are several advantages to their use. They can

⁷⁷⁸ Dr. Anthony and Mary Del Vecchio, Preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1987, p.73.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁸¹ Grugni, A.,M.D., Preparing for Marriage, Bombay: St. Paul Press, 1992, pp.47ff.

⁷⁸² More than eighty percent of the parishes surveyed during the field work still do not have lay couples in pre-marital pastoral preparation. The parish priests in most parishes still keep a lot of this ministry to themselves without allowing lay couples participation.

share/use their own marriage experience, the successes and the struggles in a supportive way. They can be trained to administer and interpret the inventories and facilitate couple's dialogue. Similar to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults design they can serve as sponsor, support, resource especially during the first year of the other couple's marriage. This ministry serves to nurture the faith life of the sponsor couple.

6.12.5 Approaches

Premarital couple's gains are maximized when pastoral work focuses on three processes:

- (i) for discussing and clarifying their individual and joint expectations for the marriage;
- (ii) for examining the familial and historical context of their relationship;
- (iii) for working on the skills known to contribute to marital success.

In the treatment of these three approaches, we shall refer to them here as "The Future Glance", "The Backwards Glance", and "Post-Wedding Premarital Preparation" respectively.

6.12.5.1 *The Future Glance*

All couples enter marriage as we have seen from the discussion of the thesis with a set of expectations, conscious and unconscious, realistic and idealistic. Marital growth consists of clarifying for oneself and one's partner what those expectations are, when they are realistic and call each other to growth, and when unrealistic and need to be modified or withdrawn. To help couples clarify and articulate their expectations for themselves and then discuss them with their partner is the aim of the first movement.

The primary focus of the first meeting is to seek to establish a good working-relationship and the importance of the work of marriage preparation with couples. An overview then of the plan for meetings will here provide a helpful structure. Verbal agreement to, and discussion of, the plan enhances commitment. The first session should include an introductory inquiry into how the couple came to know each other, a brief sketch of their history together and their plans for the future⁷⁸³. In the last thirty minutes the couple complete a premarital inventory⁷⁸⁴. The inquiry should assess the couple's views about marriage across

⁷⁸³ This idea is drawn out of the traditional enquiry stage of the Yoruba marriage.

⁷⁸⁴ This is to be drawn by the marriage preparatory group with the knowledge of the Christian community on vital areas of initial inquiry.

a number of relevant areas based on the traditional Yoruba enquiry discussed in chapter three: communications, conflict-resolution, personality, sexuality, religion, parenting, family and friends, recreation, finances, gender-roles and decision-making. The instrument to be used should help the couple talk with each other in a very concrete, focused way so that their potential defensiveness will be highly reduced.

Two full sessions need to be devoted to clarifying and discussing expectations. Which instrument to use is to be determined by either diocesan choice, parish community or finances.

6.12.5.2 *The Backward Glance*

Sessions three and four focus on the models for relational intimacy one brings from their family-of-origin. Whereas the future glance may be susceptible to a wedding/honeymoon “aura”, i.e., unwillingness to scratch the relational surface, unwillingness to consider differences, the backwards glance has the potential for a more authentic look. Many couples today are out of touch with their familial, ethnic, religious, and/or geographic roots⁷⁸⁵. Being out of touch is often assumed to be beyond the influence of those factors. However intentional or unconscious a process of distancing has been, we continue to carry “invisible loyalties”, the images and patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving from the past. These models from the past exert strong influence in mate-selection and marital functioning. The backwards glance expands the couple’s context for understanding issues, problems, perceptions and personality.

In this realm, we propose the *genogram structure*⁷⁸⁶ which is a form of family tree, a visual map for examining the facts of one’s family system across several generations and the nature of relationships in the system. Simple conventions exist for constructing the genogram. As the facts and details of their individual stories are gathered, their feelings, meanings and influence on the present are examined. Of particular interest for premarital inquiry are questions concerning: models of being male-female, father-mother, husband-wife; how roles have changed or remained constant over time; communication patterns/expressiveness; styles of resolving conflict; ritual celebrations, expression of intimacy and closeness; flexibility and change; decision-making and power.

⁷⁸⁵ This was particularly so in big heterogenous cities as observed in some cases during the field work in Lagos city.

⁷⁸⁶ There is a genogram family tree structure of Okunoye compound denoting their family connections from a generation in the appendix.

Areas of difference or disagreement should be discussed. For example, ethnic intermarriages benefit substantially from intentional exploration of each other's culture and from families spending time with each other in advance of the wedding. Significant age differences, especially with younger couples, may well present conflicting life-stage tasks and goals, e.g. balancing of career and family, timing or number of children.

Genogram work requires two full meetings. The astute pastoral person is able to connect these two "glances" correlating data from expectations work with family-of-origin work. In the context of these meetings connections can also be drawn with faith life which was incorporated into them through their various initiations in their family of origin⁷⁸⁷.

The faith interview is usually the final premarital relationship focused session with the couples. Here, depending on the couple, the faith interview should use explicit "God language" or more implicit language of values and meaning. In the former case, inquiry should focus on the images of God, perhaps paralleled with the life stories collected in the genogram component. "What did the births and/or deaths in the family tell you about faith?" "Who were your 'God-Parents' or those who taught you about God's love, acceptance, and forgiveness?" "Where did prayer, scripture, liturgy fit in the lives of your families?" "Where are they in your lives now?". Faith/marital spirituality are to be revisited as part of the post-wedding component, where the context becomes group faith sharing related to the specifics of each session.

6.13 Post-Wedding Programme

The programme of post-marital induction course is targeted towards couples who are about six to twelve months post-wedding, taking into consideration the honeymooning being over after three to five months of their wedding⁷⁸⁸. A couple is thus "ripe" for learning more about marital coping skills and for experiencing community. As the aura of the honeymoon begins to wear thin, the couple become much more aware of their differences. The differences can become disagreements and when fuelled with anger become conflicts. The skills for communicating and resolving differences are learned best at this point when a log-jam of

⁷⁸⁷ The section on initiation as used by the tripartite coagulation theory has more on the faith content.

⁷⁸⁸ The article in *Scottish Catholic Observer* has put the period of honeymooning between a year and eighteen months in Scotland. See, "CMAC Appeal for Helpers in Crisis" in *Scottish Catholic Observer*, Friday, May 10th, 1996, p.1.

resentment and unresolved issues has not yet built up. Couples feel and name their needs for the skills.

Among these needs less-articulated but no less a need is that of community. Having children glues a couple to society. A regularly offered group for couples in the first year of marriage should meet a dual need of these couples. Programmes themes at this time should include: theory and skills of communication, conflict-resolution, managing anger, creating intimacy, encouragement in marriage. The programme may differ in length, ranging from six to ten sessions, averaging an hour-and-a-half to two hours per session, and should be designed for a small group of six to eight couples. The faith/spirituality component needs to be added to the existing designs. Leadership for the groups could come from a parishioner trained as a pastoral counsellor, experienced parents and couples.

The group approach has several benefits. It may be time and energy efficient. It speeds the learning of skills, e.g. empathy, description of feelings. The group norms/learning are to continue working after the group is dissolved. The group models and encourages experimentation with behavioural alternatives for handling problems. Finally when the group experience is positive, the outcome is often an ongoing marital support or prayer group.

6.14 Other Considerations

Involvement of Parents: Involvement of the parents allows for direct assessment of the dynamics of each family system. With especially younger couples this may facilitate the differentiation process, helping them to leave home, talking to both generations about their feelings and thoughts about the transition, asking parents what wisdom they have to share with the couple from their own “leaving and cleaving”.

The pastoral action of stabilizing the Christian family then is not the action of individuals in isolation, it is an action of the ecclesial community⁷⁸⁹. The couple is to be helped to construct oneness in togetherness. The Church through marriage preparatory group orientates and re-orientates the immediate two families who are brought together in the friendship of their daughter-families. The mothers-in-law capable of buttressing the togetherness of the Christian daughter-families need special orientation and reorientation - even though their number is few - that they may know and accept their proper places as third

⁷⁸⁹ Cf. Vanier, J., Man and Woman He Made Them. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1989 ed., especially chapter three.

parties in the decision making of the conjugal togetherness⁷⁹⁰. This then is where the Church's co-ordinators and animators in marriage enrichment programme should help keep the togetherness as a sign of the union between Christ and the Church. In view of our observation and interviews on the role and place of mother-in-laws in the lives of married couples in Yorubaland, we hereby recommend that at least a session should be set aside for a thorough discussion on the role of mothers-in-law in the lives of the couples and perhaps it will be of great value if the mother-in-laws are invited to participate in that discussion session. In that respect, their unified role of support should be stressed at every stage of preparation and in the actual life-togetherness of the young couples.

6.15 Conclusion

Premarital pastoral preparation is a primary sacrament of the Church. It is a unique moment to influence two persons lives, present, past and future. It is also uniquely challenging and exciting to the pastoral person, calling forth their faith and attentiveness to God's presence in their life, challenging their professional craft, to be flexible in their interactions, to trust and to love.

The bishops of Africa and Madagascar stressed the importance of marriage preparation when they opined:

"The immediate preparation for partners to enter into a special way of life builds upon all aspects of integral human development and sex education. At this point, one concentrates on the various aspects within a given period of time and with one's intended partner. A programme of lectures would include the following: Dating, choosing a partner, the sacrament of matrimony, God's plan for marriage, sexual union, natural family planning, shared responsibility between husband and wife, family life, child care, the upbringing of children, use of money, budgeting, friends, parents, in-laws, prayers in the family life. The end view of this stage of marriage preparation is the union of couples in marriages"⁷⁹¹.

This section has therefore examined the components of pastoral premarital preparation. From our examination, we have proposed different ways that couples could be

⁷⁹⁰ Cf. Ogunduyilemi, J.T., *Op. cit.* p.124.

⁷⁹¹ SECAM, Acts of the 5th Plenary Assembly of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar 24th-30th July 1978, Nairobi, Kenya, 1978, pp. 173-174.

helped to become more aware of, discuss, and if needed negotiate the expectations they each bring to the marital relationship. Secondly, the premarital preparatory programmes recommended have expanded the context for understanding their expectations by looking back to their respective families-of-origin, source of their assumptive world views and behavioural patterns. How the past influences the present, what the couple chooses to carry from the past and/or leave behind were explored.

We have also discovered the vital role marital faith and spirituality could play as central to marital well-being and was an intentional element of the pastoral work. Following the wedding, six to twelve months later, the third component included inviting/encouraging the couple to join a group focused on skill-building for effective marital functioning.

From our discussion we see that the Church in Yorubaland would be neglecting her duty if she does not help marriageable youths to adequately prepare for a life ahead through a special and thorough catechesis starting at an early age for early Christians by presenting the good news of the family to Christians at every stage of their lives.

From our discussion too, we have seen the noble role of parents and families of both couples in the success and perhaps the failure of their ward's marriage, it will therefore be proper to involve traditional families far more in the liturgical celebrations of marriage. For example, the father of the bride should be seen as a central figure in the liturgical ceremonies in his compound. A gradual incorporation of the activities of the family into the liturgical service at the family compound will bring to an end the duplication of marriage ceremonies.

A lot has been written about the care or the apostolate of the family in Nigeria as evidenced from this study. We appreciate the on-going pastoral activities in the sector of stabilizing the family. We also observe an additional outlook in the area of Christianising the extended family. When this attempt becomes the co-responsibility of all the adult Christians and those aspiring to be adults in the Church, it is our hope that better understanding between the Christian Church and African culture will be achieved. It would be right to say therefore that the future of Christianity in Yorubaland and indeed in Nigeria and Africa is tied up with the question of inculturation. By this, I mean that Christianity will be a success or failure, strong or weak force in Africa to the extent that the project of inculturation is successful or not on the continent. Religion feeds on culture, it is expressed in and through culture. To thrive on and influence any culture, Christianity must incarnate itself in and challenge that culture in all its aspects. This therefore points to the need for a purposeful inculturation that is holistic.

7. CHAPTER SEVEN: GENERAL CONCLUSION

7.1 Preamble

We have attempted in this thesis to explore some pastoral problems which threaten not only the sacred institution of marriage but also the practice of Christian faith among the Yoruba ethnic group of South-Western Nigeria.

In this realm we decided to undertake a scientific investigation aimed at unveiling the causes of the problems. We began this investigation by highlighting the problems inherent in marriage and family life among the Yoruba using the penetration of Catholic Christian teachings about marriage and other Western influences on the traditional Yoruba culture as the benchmark of our investigation.

From the research, we have been able to pin-point and broach some of the problems created by the methodology of the preached Christianity in the understanding of the socio-religious institutions of the Yorubas and indeed of Africans. Thus life-themes, like family life and marriage, had different understandings in the Christian values from some aspects of African culture, while the similarities which can be valued in inculturation and in the successful evolution of authentic liturgies, rites and theology were underestimated and discarded for Western values, sold on the platters of civil law and education.

Like every race of mankind in every age, the Yoruba and indeed Africans have many religious beliefs. Some of these are philosophical, in that they consider great questions such as the meaning of life, death and its conquest. We find these expressed in myths which are philosophy in parables. African religious life more narrowly is shown in rituals, mime, dances, sacrifices, story-telling, politics, recitations or incantations and songs⁷⁹². Inculturation cannot but take cognisance of and embody the above religious symbols though with different significance into Christian religious life and worship.

Christian living focuses attention on life and death which is equally a major concern in African culture. The themes of birth, initiation, marriage, elevation and death are precious to the African soul. Hence, from the research findings, it is evident that marriage in Yoruba and African traditional society was impregnated with theological insights; it was seen not only as a sacred vocation and a life-long commitment but also a communal affair. As such, in order to

⁷⁹² Cf. Badejo, E.A., *Op. cit.* p.33ff.

embrace it, the parents of the would-be couples and the entire community played an important role in preparing the intending couples for marriage.

In the second chapter of the thesis, we presented the background of the Yoruba people before and after modernization brought about by colonization and Christianization. Thus the status and role of priests, diviners, and medicine-men in traditional Yoruba society depended on two important factors - the socio-political structures, and mystico-religious beliefs represented globally by their world-view. The priesthood is closely bound up with the socio-political structure which includes the immediate family, extended family or kindred, the village and the village group. Hence, the liturgical implications of the socio-political structure was expounded as a cause to influence the promotion of Yoruba and African Christian liturgical rites and worship. For example, we discovered that African kingship rituals of installation contain essential ingredients of African worship such as prayers, music, drumming, anointing, cleansing and the 'almighty' eating just to mention a few. The bodily gestures which accompany the ritual performances on such occasions indicate the deep sense of ritual feelings Africans have as well as their sense of divine mystery and transcendence. This communal sense of the sacred beckons African liturgists to explore the rites, reach out to the African spiritual heritage, analyse the data and purify their findings of all traces of unpalatable trado-religious elements and integrate their sacramental features to constitute a renewed African Christian Liturgical corpus⁷⁹³. Christ's incarnation should not be conceived only as the in-breaking of the divine *logos* in human history but also as the mystery of the advent of the Royal Prince of David born in Bethlehem⁷⁹⁴. The incarnation of Christ presupposes the incarnation of the gospel in African cultures. His incarnation is his humanization⁷⁹⁵.

⁷⁹³ These anthropological insights complement the biblical and the theological arguments to give worship in Africa its distinctive character. On the scientific rationale for the place of liturgy as an academic study in Africa, see J. Ndyabahika, "Worship in African Christianity" in Asian Journal of Theology, 20 (1991) 54-62.

⁷⁹⁴ Mt. 2:5-6.

⁷⁹⁵ Here is a nuanced view of the statement in the Lineamenta. Synod of Bishops: Special Assembly for Africa. The Church in Africa and her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000, "You Shall be my Witness" (Acts 1:8), Liberia Editrice Vaticana: Vatican City, 1990, p.48, No.48.

Thus, the Mass and the liturgical services for the Feast of Christ, the King, the consecration of bishops, parts of the liturgy for the ordination of priests and the enthronement of African Christian kings and the title-taking ceremonies of Chiefs shall become ritually indigenised with the aid of African ritual forms. The Eucharist could be partaken in as much nuanced formula of eating and drinking expressive of the minds and bodies of African participants at the rituals they are familiar with on such occasions. Such will demonstrate how Africans share and celebrate the unique biblical story of the coming of the King of kings into their world. In such celebrations, we, as Africans, shall be articulating our own identity, our communality, and our catholicity in such a manner that it transcends the traditional ritual ceremonies of Africa. In the same light, we shall be celebrating the Christian story and the good news in public and thus be showing our non-Christian brothers and sisters the gospels' superiority over our own "graphies". We shall then not only be celebrating the "Christ of culture" with our cultures but also the "Christ-against culture" and the "Christ-transforming culture"⁷⁹⁶. By so doing, King-Christology will enrich our encounter expressed in the regular worshipping and witnessing patterns of life of African Christian congregations.

On account of the demands of married life in the third chapter, a long period was set aside for adequate preparation of the youths for marriage and this was marked by different stages like investigation made by marriage intermediary, negotiations by the families of the would-be spouses, chaste courtship and the final traditional wedding. We equally discovered the importance attached to virginity in the traditional Yoruba and African society. It was only those prospective brides who preserved their virginity that received a prestigious honour and fills her parents with pride that they brought up their child according to acceptable societal norms. On the contrary, those who were discovered to have lost their virginity (and worst of all, if they were pregnant out of wedlock) were not only subjects of ridicule in the society, but even at home such ladies were a kind of 'thorn in the flesh' of their parents and relatives. We equally discovered in this chapter that gifts were exchanged by the two families at marriage as a token of gratitude, appreciation and friendship established between them. Special gifts were given to the brides as portrayed in the preservation of their virginity. Besides this, the virgin brides were held in high esteem at their matrimonial homes. We discovered the abuse of the meaning of bride-price today in some Nigerian societies as against the original meaning and place in the traditional societies. It is seen now as a source of exploitation and enslavement

⁷⁹⁶ Cf. Manus, U.C., Op. cit. p. 244.

and indirectly responsible for the present marriage instability because when the inevitable misunderstanding through inter-ethnic marriages between spouses occurs they go and get divorced in court instead of having the case settled by the parents-in-law who of course may not have been informed of their marriage intentions at the time of their wedding. What emerges from this is that it is of vital importance to educate the people, especially the parents of the prospective brides, to be aware of the fact that if society discharges its function in this regards it is never an encroachment on their private familial matters but rather for the smooth running of the society. By so doing the parents would bear in mind that African life is not an individual venture, each one for himself but in virtue of man's social nature, to exist is to live in a group, to see things with the group and to do things that promotes marriage and family life in the group.

Chapter four of the thesis X-rayed the understanding and development of the theology of Catholic Christian marriage. From our findings, the Christian marriage as we have it today grew within some specific social contexts. First as a social mark of a change in life-status, marriage gives recognition and social sanction with its rights and obligations on the couple. When the Church left the Jewish milieu in the Middle-East for the Western tradition in Rome and Constantinople, Christian marriage assumed the social norms and legal trappings of the Greek and the Latin peoples to this day. It is these legal trappings that have brought the great divide between what marriage stands for in the African society and in the Christian world-view. The legal trappings here are from the canonical form as expressed in canon 1063 and subsequent codes. The canons enjoin Christian concepts, the ceremonials embedded in the liturgy, where consent is freely and publicly expressed, that the marriage is celebrated in a recognised Church and before a witness of the Church, that is, the pastor or his delegate as the case warrants. These strategies of conversion and socialization on the best-trying culture of the Africans like marriage and family life were, in large measure, responsible for many defects and deficiencies that exist in the Christian Churches. In order to reconcile this cultural divide of canonical form, we proffer a meaningful programme of dialogue with Yoruba or Nigerian traditional religion and culture that can help to bail the Christian religion out of its present malaise. This was borne out in chapter five on the intercultural dialogue on points of harmony and discord between Christian/Western and Yoruba traditional marriages. Despite the close affinity between Yoruba family traditions regarding marriage practices, philosophy and religious practices, and those of the Christian doctrines, the findings showed enormous differences generated out of sheer bias, misunderstanding and wilful ignorance. The control

issues of divergence between the two cultures stem from these values acquired by both from interaction with other cultures; namely Roman, Anglo-Saxon and British.

In view of the similarities between the Christian and Yoruba cultures, we proposed that this must be exploited to an advantage so as to enable Christ to be incarnate in the various communities in the world, most especially in Yorubaland, and indeed, in Africa. To this end, we proffer that the most urgent need now is to develop in the African Church a 'theology of the future' which will have an accommodation for all on actual conditions of modern living. To this end, we situate chapter six in this context. We recommended how inculturation must be a determining factor in the process of the Church in Africa travelling into the future.

We recommended a proposal for Christianizing the Yoruba traditional marriage practices and customs. In order to eliminate dichotomies, there is the need for a marriage rite that will take into cognisance the vision of marriage and culturally-rooted marriage rites of the Yoruba. The inculturated rites proposed are designed as far as possible to eliminate the dichotomy and duplication of marriage rites so that Yoruba Christians can celebrate their marriage in a meaningful, culturally-relevant ceremony that is compatible with Christian doctrine and discipline. To do this perfectly, we proffered a "Tripartite Coagulation Model" based on the theory of seeing the basic family unit as a domestic Church. It is the postulate of the thesis and its recommendation that if faith is to be genuine and fully lived-out it must become culture. The Church in Yorubaland and Africa needs the faith taking root in Africa to be called Church. It would therefore be irrelevant to the African, the reign of dichotomy between faith and life, a juxtaposition of two parallel lines. But to plant the faith without integrating African culture into Christianity, would be to create a parochial faith of at best a continental religion, a re-enactment of the drama of Babel, a closed in, destructive system.

Using this model therefore, the thesis identified three corporate bodies/parties involved. They are: the individual/personal experience, traditional family community and the Christian community. The three are seen to be working together in building up the Body of Christ - "The Church" and the bench mark of coagulation is the *Initiation rites* which is common to incorporation in both cultures. To effect these workings, five stages towards inculturated marriage were recommended, namely: Request and Response based on the traditional preparatory pattern, Interview of the Bridegroom-to-be with his family as the second stage; the third stage is the engagement stage which we now termed today as marriage. Here the interview continues and the exchange of gifts and other rituals involved before the handing over ceremony of the lady in marriage to the husband. The fourth stage is the

entertainment of all guests present, while the sixth and final stage is the thanksgiving in the Church of choice of the couple and honeymooning. We equally recommended that the venue of the marriage must be in the bride's parents family compound and that the Christian community must be involved in all the different stages of the ceremonies.

To effectively monitor these rites, we proffer that pastoral premarital preparation is a primary sacrament of the Church and that the Christian community must make it a duty to help prepare marriageable youths for a life ahead through a special and thorough catechesis starting at an early age for early Christians by presenting the good news of the family to Christians at every stage of their lives. A programme of preparation was equally designed to effect the pastoral preparations of every age group.

7.2 Inculturation: The Way Ahead

We may sum up these reflections by defining development as dynamic progression or upward movement in the spiritual, moral and material welfare of the human person and of all the people. It is, on the one hand, the maximal presence of human dignity and integrity, mutual love and justice, sociability and hospitality, responsibility and discipline, and on the other hand, the minimal presence (or desirable absence) of war, homicide, suicide, drug addiction, mental breakdown, oppression and starvation. In other words, human development is the progressive humanization of society. African Christian Humanism seeks to promote this humanization of society by championing the movement away from the materialistic and mechanistic, and toward the humanistic. As African Christian Humanism revolts against materialism, it also rejects spiritualism, the purely internal religion that is oblivious of the plight of humanity in this world⁷⁹⁷. The driving force of this neo-African humanism, is an abiding faith in God, whose Son, Jesus Christ, is "the human person fully alive"!

We may close the door to anarchy in theological thinking but the window remains open to all original and constructive contributions to theological growth in the Church. One thing about originality and creative thinking is that there is always the element of risk - the risk of error. The problem with the young African Churches and their new breed of theologians, I think, is that they are too afraid to risk, and like a child who is afraid to bruise his knee, they will never learn to walk. The flood gate is open now in the area of marriage inculturation.

I would like to end with the initial problem and questions addressed by the thesis which have always been echoed by most African writers. When will the African Churches

⁷⁹⁷ Cf. Ehusani, G.O., *Op. cit.*

dare to be original - even at the risk of making a single mistake? When shall we stop being but a mere echo of European theology - repeating with the precision of Pavlov's dogs the second-hand ideas of our past colonial masters? When shall we stop being spectators in our own drama - while our own house is on fire? Is it possible to have so many doctors in theology yet very few theologians? What use is a dumb prophet?⁷⁹⁸

7.3 Areas for Further Research

Our concentration in this piece of work has been on the inculturation of marriage practices among the Yoruba Christians which is only an aspect in the areas of inculturation theology in the Yoruba Church and indeed African Churches. Because of the limited scope of our study, it has not been able to give adequate treatment to other areas of African life that calls for inculturation. There are yet a lot of virgin grounds to be covered in inculturation. To this effect, we would like to suggest three important and most urgent areas that need further research among others.

(i) First, the Visual Arts, whether plastic (sculpture) or chromatic (painting) have great potential for carrying home in a graphic way the message of inculturation. Two areas are of note here. One is the interpretation of biblical motifs, images and personalities in terms of local African idiom; the other is Christian interpretation of local motifs such as statues of the Virgin Mary and holy pictures.

(ii) Second, the Eucharistic Liturgy. How we evolve an African Eucharistic ritual demands serious study and research so that each part of the celebration may be properly interpreted and integrated in the light of African ritual sensitivity and Christian liturgical spirit.

(iii) Third, Inculturation in respect of contemporary political, socio-moral and economic order in society. This has to do with critical interaction between the Christian faith and the gospel message on one hand, and secular culture on the other for the purpose of influencing contemporary society in a Christian direction. It involves Christian evaluation of the political, economic and socio-moral issues in society in the light of the gospel message, and commitment to action to bring about societal transformation in a Christian direction.

⁷⁹⁸ Cf. Obuna, E., African Priests and Celibacy, Rome: Leberit Press, 1986, p.112.

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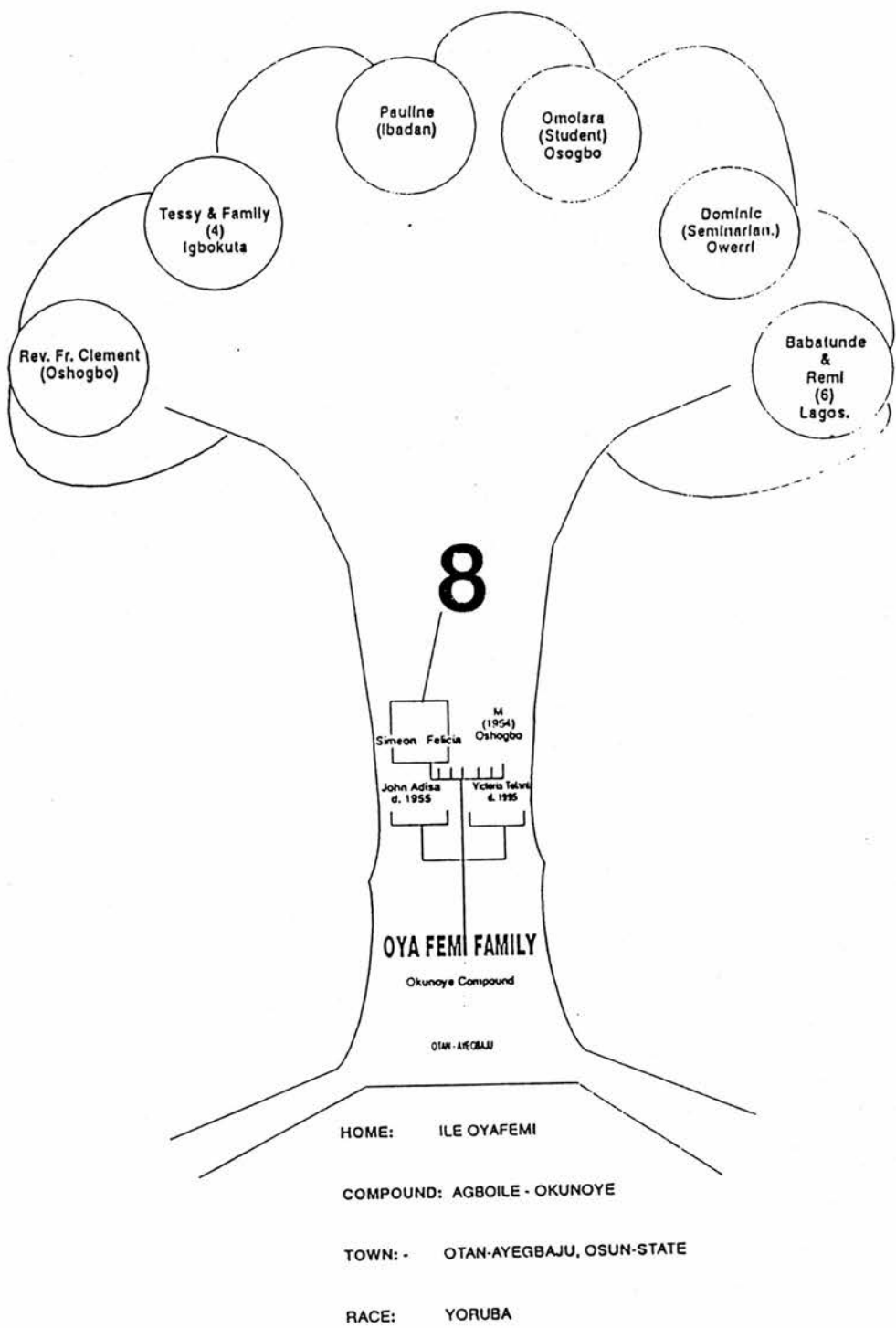
Vatican II Documents (Flannery Edition)

Vatican II (Post-Conciliar Documents, Flannery ed.)

9. APPENDICES

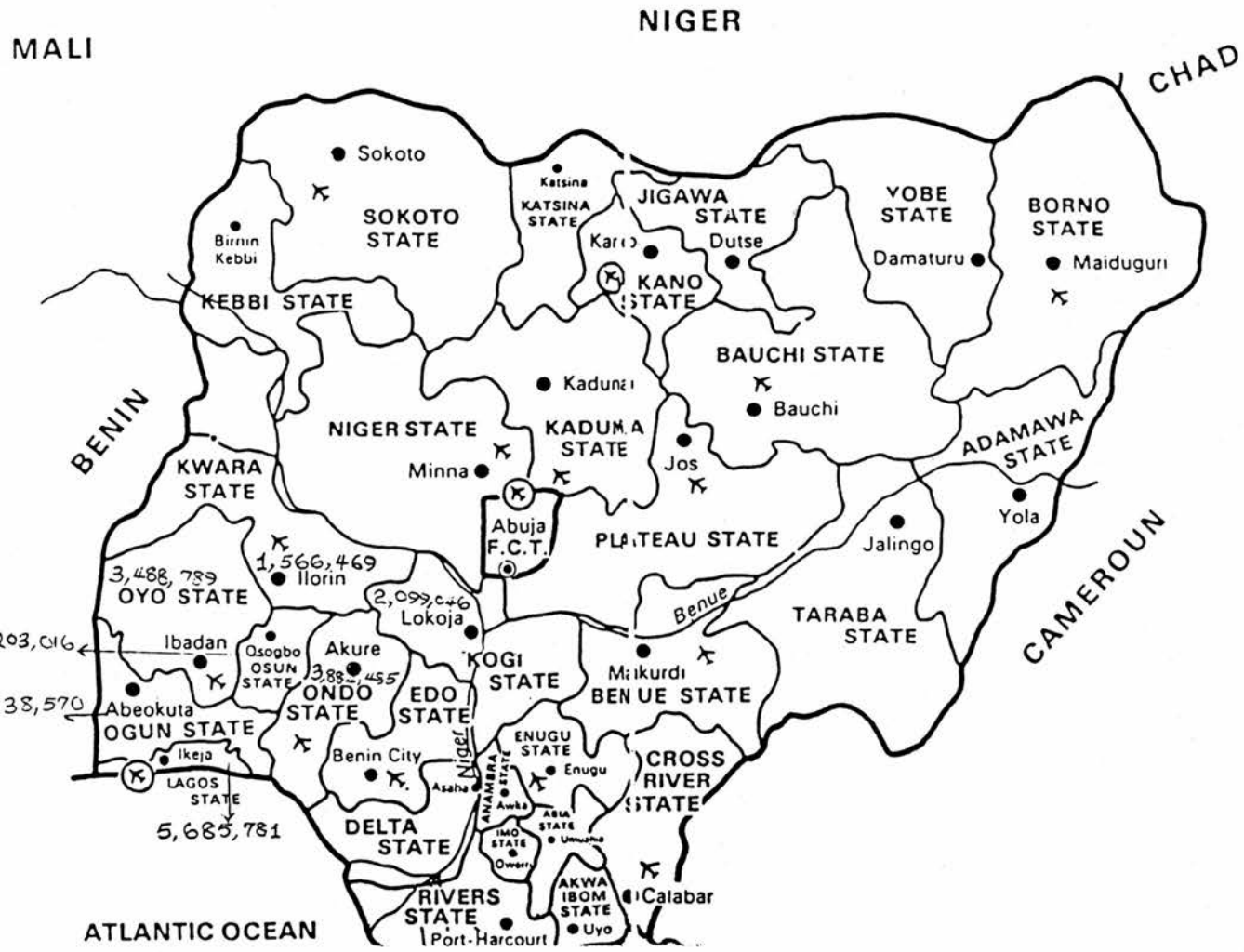
9.1 Appendix One

THE FAMILY TREE

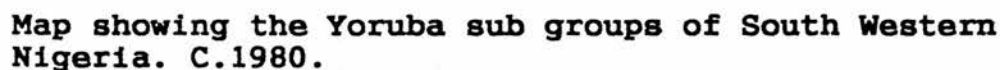


A Genogram or a family tree typifying an extended family structure among the Yoruba society.

9.2 Appendix Two



Political map of Nigeria showing the 30 States of Nigeria with the population figures of the States demarcated as Yoruba sub groups. C.1990.



9.4 Appendix Four

TOUR GUIDE AND COVERAGE

LOCATION	SUBGROUP	STATE	STOP OVER
IWORO-AJIDO BADAGRY (AJARA) IGBOKURA OKESUNA EPETEDO	AWORI EGUN IJBEBU (EKO) ISALE-EKO	LAGOS	BADAGRY IKORODU LAGOS
IGBOGILA OWU/ABEOKUTA OSOSA	EGBADO EGBA IJBEBU	OGUN	EWEEKORO ABEOKUTA IJBEBU-ODE
IROKO FIDITI IGANA IGBO-ELERIN	OYO OKE-OGUN IBADAN IBARAPA	OYO	OYO TOWN OKEHO IBADAN LANLATE OR APATA
ORA (ILA) IGBAJO OBA IFEWARA * YAKOYO IGANGAN EKOSIN/FAJI	IGBOMINA IJESHA OYO IFE ILESIA (ODO-OTIN)	OSUN	ILA-ORANGUN IKIRUN OSOGHO IFE IFE ILESIA INISIA
ODE-IRELE IPELE IJELU(OYE) ONDO IJARE	IKALE OWO EKITI ONDO AKURE	ONDO	OKITI-PUPA OWO ADO-EKITI ONDO AKURE
ERINLE OMUPO SHAO* ILOFA EKINRIN-ADE	OYUN IGBOMINA ILORIN EKITI OWE*	KWARA KOGI	OFFA ORO ILORIN OMU-ARAN KAABA

Tour guide and Coverage of towns and villages visited.

9.5 Appendix Five

1991 Nigerian Population Census Figures

State	Males	Females	Total
1. Abia	1,108,357	1,189,621	2,297,978
2. Adamawa	1,084,824	1,039,225	2,124,049
3. Akwa Ibom	1,162,430	1,197,306	2,359,736
4. Anambra	1,374,801	1,393,102	2,767,903
5. Bauchi	2,202,962	2,091,451	4,294,413
6. Benue	1,385,402	1,394,996	2,780,398
7. Borno	1,327,311	1,269,278	2,596,589
8. Cross River	945,270	920,334	1,865,604
9. Delta	1,273,208	1,296,973	2,570,181 *
10. Edo	1,082,718	1,077,130	2,159,848 *
11. Enugu	1,482,245	1,679,050	3,161,295
12. Imo	1,178,031	1,307,468	2,485,499
13. Jigawa	1,419,726	1,410,203	2,829,929
14. Kaduna	2,059,382	1,909,870	3,969,252
15. Kano	2,858,724	2,773,316	5,632,040
16. Katsina	1,944,218	1,934,126	3,878,344
17. Kebbi	1,024,334	1,037,892	2,062,226
18. Kogi	1,055,964	1,043,082	<u>2,099,046</u>
19. Kwara	790,921	775,548	<u>1,566,469</u>
20. Lagos	2,999,528	2,686,253	<u>5,685,781</u>
21. Niger	1,290,720	1,191,647	2,482,367
22. Ogun	1,144,907	1,193,663	<u>2,338,570</u>
23. Ondo	1,958,928	1,925,557	<u>3,884,485</u>
24. Osun	1,079,424	1,123,592	<u>2,203,016</u>
25. Oyo	1,745,720	1,743,069	<u>3,488,789</u>
26. Plateau	1,645,730	1,637,974	3,283,704
27. Rivers	2,079,583	1,904,274	3,983,857
28. Sokoto	2,158,111	2,234,280	4,392,391
29. Taraba	754,754	725,836	1,480,590
30. Yobe	719,763	691,718	1,411,481
31. Abuja, F.C.T.	206,535	172,136	378,671
Country Total:	44,544,531	43,969,970	88,514,501

SOURCE: NATIONAL POPULATION COMMISSION.

Nigerian Population Census based on 1991 figures.
The underlined figures show areas and States with
predominantly Yoruba speaking groups.